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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 415. FOR WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 12TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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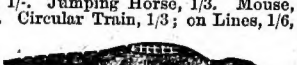

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SHORT STORIES

No. 415.] [One Penny.

Edited by

C. Arthur Pearson.

For the Week ending December 12th, 1896.

The Doctor's Diary.

Stranded! That one emphatic word best expresses my position this pleasant spring morning. The catastrophe that has swept away my savings, the carefully garnered sum that was to pay for my summer trip is commonplace enough.

Banks break every day, and the funds of trusting depositors disappear in the collapse. I was one of those confiding depositors. Before me lies my cherished letter of credit, just a sheet of worthless waste-paper—nothing more. And when my hotel bill has been paid, and I have settled for that particularly stylish black-lace bonnet that tempted me on the Rue St. Honoré the other evening into becoming its purchaser, I shall stand alone in Paris with just thirty-seven francs in my purse. Stay—let me be exact—thirty-six francs and fifteen sous, to speak correctly.

And what an idiot I was not to have bought a return ticket when I purchased my passage! But I was so miserably run down when I started, and I had a vision of a visit to Berlin to investigate the Koch lymph question; and, also, I indulged in a dream of a trip to Vienna, and a consequent excursion to Trieste and Venice; and, in fact, there were so many delicious possibilities before me, that I could not decide what line of steamships I ought to come home by, or what exact date to fix for my voyage. And here I am, as I said before—stranded!

Well, I'll think the matter over. I'll bathe my face and smooth my hair; and then I'll go round to the little restaurant where I have been wont to take my meals, and I'll spend a few of my remaining francs on a good dinner. And then I'll try to come to some decision.

I want to think out some plan by which I can remain abroad for some time longer. I should hate to go creeping home, wailing and crestfallen, like a dog that has had his tail pinched in a doorway. Besides, I need the change so sorely, and I am just beginning to feel the good effects of my trip. I'll manage to stay over here somehow. I'll sink the M.D., and look for a situation.

But a situation—as what? I know little or nothing about foreign travel, so I cannot turn into a courier maid. I never could make my own dresses, or arrange my own hair satisfactorily, so I should hardly pass muster as lady's maid. I speak barely enough French to make my wants known and to get along with, so it is impossible for me to try for a place as governess, even if I were well up in the other fashionable accomplishments of the day, which, unfortunately, I am not. I can neither paint nor sing, nor play upon the piano.

The position for which I am really suited is that of nurse, or of companion to an invalid lady. I'll even stifle my pride and sink the M.D., as I said before, and look about me in search of such a situation.

There are so many persons who come abroad in search of health, that I might possibly discover a place that would be just what I wanted. Then I would remain on this side of the Channel for some months longer, and might have a chance of finishing my researches into the nature and effects of vegetable poisons, as compared with those of mineral ones. At all events, I'll write out an advertisement for the *British Blazer*, and I'll take it round at once, before going to my dinner.

June 25th. I take up my note-book to record the swift and unexpected success of my little scheme. have been engaged by Dr. Laurence Hurst as companion

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to Mrs. Hurst, who is in very delicate health, and who needs amusement and occupation for her mind. Dr. Hurst has himself taken the whole charge of his wife's case, and I can see that he is very jealous of any interference with his measures, for he asked me very particularly if I could be relied upon to administer medicines, and to carry out his directions in all respects.

I replied meekly that I had always been accustomed to obey my employer's wishes, and that I should never think of running contrary to any orders that I might receive.

What a providential thing it was for me, that twinge of pride that led me to conceal my actual status as a regularly diplomaed physician. For, from what I can see of Dr. Hurst, I am certain that he would never have consented to endure the presence of a rival doctor beneath his roof, and at the bedside of his wife. Fortunately, I persuaded the kind friends, that were my references as to respectability and capacity, to keep silent on the subject of my profession. So to-morrow I shall enter on my functions as plain Miss Davis—no longer Jane Davis, M.D.

June 26th. She is a most winning creature, is Mrs. Hurst, fair and delicate, with great, soft, wistful brown eyes, like those of a pet doe. There does not seem to be very much the matter with her. Certainly she is not consumptive, and I can ascertain no symptoms of heart disease. Still, she is far from well, and I shall study her case with interest. Meanwhile, I am already deeply interested in her as an individual, and not as a case. The plaintive sweetness of her voice, the timid touch of her delicate fingers when she took my hand in hers, and the shy, pretty way in which she said: "Now, I hope you are going to take good care of me, and help dear Laurence to make me well," all captivated me forthwith.

I am not altogether so fascinated with Dr. Hurst. He is small, and dark, and florid, is a great society man and an accomplished dancer, I am told; but he has a nervous, uncertain way of looking about him, and of acting, as well.

He fusses over the newspapers, and torments everybody about his letters and papers; and as soon as they arrive, he goes off to his own room to read them. However, he is certainly most devoted to his wife, and watches over her with unremitting solicitude. They have two fine children: Hugh, a rosy, sturdy boy of four; and baby Madge, who is just eight months old, and a most winsome little creature, as even I must confess, though in my position as an old maid I ought, of course, to abominate babies. But Madge is one of those cooing, laughing, sociable, little things that make friends with every stranger on the spot—never cries, and is altogther delightful.

Mrs. Hurst is not strong enough to have her little ones much with her; but her half-hour's play in the morning with the baby is, for her, I can see, the chief event of the day. She has an excellent nurse for them in the shape of a sturdy, good-natured Alsatian woman, called Catherine, whose patience, even with boisterous Hugh, seems to be untiring.

July 3rd, Boulogne-sur-Mer. Here we are established at this old-fashioned place of seaside resort. The move was rather a sudden one. The weather became very warm in Paris, so Dr. Hurst made up his mind to bring the whole party down here, having great faith in the tonic quality of the air, and also approving of the smooth, sandy beach as a playground for the children. Mrs. Hurst would have preferred Houlgate or Etretat, on account of the presence at either of those places of quite a number of her acquaintances, but her husband was deaf to her gentle pleadings.

"My dear Jessie," he said at length, rather impatiently, "society and excitement are just the worst things possible for you in your present ailing condition. Here, at Boulogne, you have nothing to do but recline on your *chaise longue* at the window, and look at the sea and read novels, and make haste to get well."

"I suppose Laurence is right, Jane," she said with a sigh, after he had left the room. "I do wish he could hasten my recovery in some way. It is so tiresome to be suffering always, and to feel one's self growing weaker day by day. Jane, I am beginning to believe that I shall never get well—that I am going to die."

"Dear Mrs. Hurst, you must not take to imagining all sorts of dismal things. Your recovery is only a question of time. And with a skilled physician always at hand——"

"And one who loves me so, and watches over me so carefully; and with such a faithful nurse as yourself, I ought to shake off my sickness very speedily. I have an idea, Jane—but you must say nothing about it to Laurence, for I once said something of the kind to him, and he got really angry with me—I think if I took less medicine that I should feel better."

Perhaps the medicines she is taking do not suit her case. At all events, she is looking very ill—far worse, in fact, than she did a week ago. Still, I have privately investigated the prescriptions; and they seem to be simple enough, and precisely suited to the nature of her illness, being chiefly preparations of iron in different forms. And as I am pledged to follow out the doctor's orders in all respects, I cannot very well encourage Mrs. Hurst in her idea of dispensing with drugs, even for a time.

July 8th. Decidedly Mrs. Hurst is growing worse. I can see a marked change in her within the last two or three days; and I am beginning to believe that I shall be professionally considered an arrant idiot. In spite of my medical studies, and the brilliant way in which I passed my examination, and my real enthusiasm for my profession, I fear that I am lacking in one of the most essential of a doctor's qualifications—the power of diagnosis. I cannot make out what it is that ails this poor lady, at whose bedside I have been watching for so many days. And, to make things worse, Dr. Hurst has been summoned to Paris on important business, which will detain him for a week or ten days. I can see that Mrs. Hurst feels his departure very much, though she is too weak to be very demonstrative. However, he has caused all the medicines that she is to take during his absence to be made up in sufficient quantities to last till his return, and has left me written directions as to the administering of them—in what proportions, at what intervals of time, etc. But the invalid will sadly miss, I fear, his constant companionship and his tender care, for he always insists upon preparing and administering even her beef tea, or milk and limewater, with his own hands.

July 14th. I am pleased to be able to record a decided improvement in Mrs. Hurst's condition. She is brighter and stronger, and declares that she feels infinitely better, in spite of the fact that she sadly misses her husband's watchful tenderness. But she takes nourishment now with genuine relish, and even with something of an appetite, and she had a game of romps

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with little Hugh this morning, which would have quite tired her out a week ago. Also she is resuming, one by one, the occupations that she had wholly laid aside. For instance, she wrote quite a long letter this morning in answer to one just received from her intimate friend, the Countess Cecchi, an Italian lady, whose acquaintance the Hursts made when they were at Monte Carlo last winter, and who stood godmother to little Madge, her own name being Margherita. She sent Mrs. Hurst one of her latest photographs the other day. What an exceedingly handsome woman!

I must not forget to record a piece of stupid awkwardness on my own part, which I perpetrated on the very day of Dr. Hurst's departure. It may serve as a warning to me to be more careful in future, if I set it down here in writing. In getting out the bottle containing the tonic, on whose effects the doctor relies so much for Mrs. Hurst, I let it slip from my fingers, and it fell on the marble hearthstone and was smashed to pieces. Luckily the side of the phial on which was pasted the label inscribed with the directions and the number of the prescription was merely cracked, so I was able to have the medicine made up again. I shall pay for the fresh bottle out of my own pocket, as a fine for myself for having been a fool, and shall say nothing about the accident to anyone.

JULY 20TH. Dr. Hurst returns this evening. The improvement in his wife's condition continues. If she goes on getting better in the same proportion that she has done within the last few days, she will be well by the time we leave Boulogne.

JULY 24TH. Mrs. Hurst is again very ill, and the doctor is more nervous and anxious about her than ever. He scarcely ever leaves her bedside, except to open and read the letters and papers which arrive for him daily by post. These he takes to his own room, and he shuts himself up there to peruse them at his leisure. I am certain that in the last lot he received there was a letter from the Countess Cecchi. Her handwriting is very peculiar, being unusually bold and heavy for a woman, and I recognised it in the direction. He said nothing to Mrs. Hurst about it, however. The Countess sent yesterday a pair of gold-embroidered Turkish slippers for the baby; tiny *babouches* in velvet, with wads of paper stuffed in the toes, to keep them in shape. A pretty token of remembrance, though little Madge is not quite old enough to put them on.

JULY 25TH. I am beginning to suspect that some of the worst of Mrs. Hurst's symptoms are caused by arsenic. I asked her the other day if she had ever taken any as a cosmetic to improve her complexion. She smiled faintly, and said that at one time an eruption had made its appearance on her face, and she had taken a preparation of arsenic for some months to remove it.

"And you never take any now, my dear lady?"

"Oh, no! Dr. Hurst would not approve of it, so please do not mention to him the fact of my having used it."

JULY 27TH. Mrs. Hurst's symptoms are much aggravated. If a change does not take place within the next fortnight, she will not live three weeks.

A horrible suspicion has gradually been taking shape and consistency in my mind. Seen by the light of recent occurrences, it seems to me that Mrs. Hurst is dying slowly by poison. But who is giving it to her? It is not I. It surely cannot be——

A strange occurrence has just come to arouse my suspicions to keen activity. Mrs. Hurst had been trying to take some milk and lime water, prepared with a tablespoonful of brandy, and all measured out by her attentive husband. She had swallowed only a small portion of it, and the doctor was coaxing her to drink some more, when little Hugh came trotting into the room. He spied the half-emptied tumbler on the tray, and seized it with a cry of triumph. His father literally struck the glass out of the child's hand, turning ghastly pale as he did so. Mrs Hurst was startled by the crash, but the doctor laid the blame on the little boy's carelessness. Yet the breakage was not Hugh's fault, but his own.

I have secured the bottom portion of the tumbler, as of course I helped to pick up the broken glass. It still contains sufficient milk to serve for an analysis.

JULY 29TH. I have made the analysis. My worst suspicions are confirmed. The milk was heavily charged with arsenic. I shall begin at once to administer antidotes to the patient. Also I had duplicate bottles of her medicine made up, which I keep under lock and key, and which I substitute for those which Dr. Hurst investigates so carefully.

But how to find out the truth? How am I to establish that link which is always so difficult to demonstrate in cases of poisoning—that which connects the poisoner with the crime? I must be on the watch; else, as the dangerous symptoms in Mrs. Hurst's malady begin to become ameliorated once more, the criminal, grown desperate, may be impelled to strike a decisive blow.

But what can be his motive? Why should anyone wish to murder so gentle and inoffensive a being as Mrs. Hurst? And from whence does he procure his supplies of poison? His prescriptions are all harmless; of that I have already assured myself. Perhaps I am mistaken, after all. But no, the poor lady's symptoms are unmistakable—and then that incident of the glass of milk!

AUGUST 5TH. Let me write down a relation of the events that have just transpired, though I can hardly as yet command myself enough to do it coherently.

Two days ago, Mrs Hurst, who has been gradually improving (thanks, I am assured, to the antidotes I have been administering to her in secret), was lying in bed in a very tranquil, if feeble, state. At the foot of the bed, and consequently screened from view by the bed curtains which are looped back, falling at the head and foot of the couch, was placed a low table, above which hung a mirror.

Dr. Hurst, after luncheon, brought in his writing materials, and declared that he meant to answer a number of letters to go by the post of the afternoon. "But I will not desert you, Jessie, dear, or even go as far as the sitting-room. I will not disturb you, but will be here within call." Mrs. Hurst acquiesced in her submissive, affectionate way, and the doctor sat down to his correspondence.

Just then Catherine brought in the baby to show off her new pretty slippers, the Countess Cecchi's gift, which were worn that day for the first time. The little one was sleepy, and was inclined to be cross, so as it was the nurse's dinner hour, I told Catherine that I would take charge of the child, and would try to get her to sleep if she would leave her with me. The truth was that I wanted to keep my eye on Dr. Hurst, a proceeding that I could very well manage whilst walking up and down the room with the baby. For a very thick letter, directed to him in the peculiar handwriting of the Countess Cecchi, arrived for him that morning. He

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retreated as usual to his own room to read it, and came forth looking visibly discomposed, and he has been absent-minded and gloomy ever since.

Time went on. Mrs. Hurst dozed, the doctor wrote and the baby went fast asleep in my arms; but I still continued my noiseless pacing to and fro. At last the doctor finished his voluminous epistle, signed it in his usual elaborate fashion with a grand flourish, got out an envelope, folded the written sheets, and slipped them into it.

Just then, his valet, Watson, tapped softly at the door, to announce the arrival of an English tailor from London, with half-a-dozen suits that Dr. Hurst had ordered, and over the non-appearance of which he had been fussing for some days past. So, merely wetting the gummed edge of the envelope flap, the doctor closed it; but without writing the direction, he tossed the blank envelope on the writing-table, turned, and went off in a great hurry.

Now was my chance—now or never! I laid little Madge softly down on the sofa, and snatching up the sheet of blotting paper that Dr. Hurst had been using, I held it before the mirror. Here and there a word only was legible, but those words confirmed my worst suspicions. I took possession of the letter, and hastily folded and placed some sheets of paper in an envelope, precisely like that which Dr. Hurst had employed. Leaving this *fac-simile* on the desk, I hid the real letter in my pocket, rang the bell to summon Catherine, and giving over the sleeping child and the slumbering invalid to her care, I hastened up to my bedroom, bolted the door to insure myself against interruption, and with a throbbing heart and trembling fingers, I proceeded to open the letter. This is what I read:

My own Darling, my only Love.—I cannot tell you, dearest and most adored of women, how much your last letter has distressed me. I can understand your impatience, but wait, and bear with the suspense and the anxiety of the affair just a little longer. I promise you that the crisis shall not be long delayed. I cannot comprehend how it is that Mrs. Hurst has lived so long. I thought her death imminent when I went off to Paris a few weeks ago (as I wrote you, I left so as to be out of the way when the final catastrophe took place), but when I returned I found her decidedly better.

One thing I have discovered—she used to take small doses of arsenic some years ago for the improvement of her complexion, and so her system became accustomed to the action of that poison, and she was thus enabled to resist its effects for so long. Also I mistrust that companion of hers—Jane Davis. I fancy she suspects something, but it is no matter if she does; I have never ordered or purchased a grain of arsenic all through my wife's illness, thanks to your wise suggestion of sending me whatever we found necessary. That was a capital idea of yours to forward the arsenic in the baby's slippers. I really thought that supply would prove sufficient to finish the affair, but there have been delays—inexplicable delays.

So we must try something else—something that will act with certainty as well as speedily. I suggest prussic acid, and send you the formula required to procure it. Have this prescription made up five or six times; for a single dose, though strong, would not necessarily prove fatal. I can administer it in a glass of almond cream, which Mrs. Hurst is fortunately very fond of, so that the peculiar odour of bitter almonds will excite no suspicion. You see, impatient though I am to fly to your side, I understand how to take all necessary precautions. And when all is over, what an existence of love and joy and luxury lies before us!

My wife's will, leaving me her whole fortune (with the reversion to the children, unhappily), is neither to be attacked nor set aside. I took good legal advice on that question when I was in Paris the other day. It will trammel us greatly to have the enjoyment of the income from the estate merely, but I could not persuade Jessie to leave me her fortune absolutely, as I wished her to do. However, we shall be wealthy enough to realise all our dreams of splendour—Love's paradise walled around with gold!

I think you had best send the prussic acid in some other article of finery for Madge. One of those large-sized Roman sashes would do to envelop it in, or you might send the baby a second pair of slippers; Mrs. Hurst was so pleased with the first pair. I think we have taken our precautions to perfection. No one can connect either one of us with Mrs. Hurst's death, even should the fact of the poisoning be found out, which is simply impossible. Good-bye, my dear love. In a few weeks we shall be together, never to be separated any more,—Yours adoringly, Laurence Hurst.

When I had read the last word of this dreadful letter I crushed it between my shaking hands and thrust it into my breast. What was I to do? How was I to save the unhappy lady from the direful fate that threatened her? The law? The commissary of police? Yes—yes—that was it—I must hurry to the police office. But while I was in the act of tying my bonnet there came a tap on the door, and Catherine's voice cried gleefully:

"Come downstairs, Mdlle. Jeanne—come down! The brother of madame has just arrived, and she wants you to help her to dress herself. And you must get out the new morning gown that monsieur brought her from Paris—so come—quick!"

"Her brother? Heaven be praised!" I murmured to myself, as, throwing aside my bonnet, I hastened downstairs.

I found myself face to face with a strongly built, serious-looking gentleman, Gilbert Flemming by name, a lawyer of high repute, as his sister had often told me.

After the first agitated greetings between the long-parted brother and sister were at an end, I took Mr. Flemming aside, told him the whole story of Mrs. Hurst's illness, and ended by placing the intercepted letter in his hands. As may well be imagined, he was inexpressibly shocked.

"I came over on a sudden impulse, Miss Davis," he said, "and I did not write to announce my coming, wishing to give my poor sister a surprise. It is as well that I did so, for, had the exact date of my arrival been known, that scoundrel would probably have terminated his nefarious work before I could get here."

Dr. Hurst was arrested for the attempted murder of his wife before the sun had set. In his elegant, carefully arranged clothing was found stored away enough poison to have killed a regiment. There was a packet of arsenic in the breast-pocket of his dress-coat, and another of corrosive sublimate in the lining of his dressing-gown, and so on.

And he must have had some deadly drug secreted in a hiding-place in the suit he had on when he was taken, for, though he was carefully searched before he was locked up in his cell, he was found dead the next morning, with every token of a death by poison on his distorted features. He had destroyed all the letters written to him by his accomplice; so the Countess Cecchi, not less guilty than himself, and probably more so, got off scot-free.

Mrs. Hurst long lay at death's door, no less from the shock to her system from learning of the guilt of her idolised husband, and his subsequent suicide, than from the effect of the poisons that had been administered to her. She recovered at last, and Mr. Flemming took her and her little ones back with him to England. He has settled on me a comfortable little annuity, as a reward, he said, for saving his sister's life. So I mean to remain in France for at least a year longer, to complete my investigations into the properties of mineral poisons.

L. H. H.

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IF A WOMAN WILL.

THE Rector of St Michael's sat in his study in deep perplexity. The general expression of his face was troubled; but occasionally an extremely self-complacent look stole over it, which was promptly and vigorously pulled back.

He held a cream-tinted envelope from which a faint perfume of violets was wafted. The charming writer floated before his mental vision. Her pretty white hands, appealing brown eyes, and small, daintily rounded figure, were quite pleasantly distinct; and the letter said:

DEAR MR. FIELDING,—I have no excuse to offer for this letter. I throw myself entirely upon your mercy and your manliness. I have argued. This is a matter of life or death with me. I see only one chance. Why is it unwomanly to take it? I have heard women say that a feeling of tenderness always sprang up in their hearts for a man when they knew he loved them. As for myself (is it brutal and indelicate to mention it?) I never thought of poor, dear Jack until he told me what I was to him, and I am sure his life with me satisfied him.

So arguing, I make a desperate throw. I love you. I have said it so often to myself that it is easy to write it. Has any idea of it ever crept into your absorbed, austere brain? With me, you can give your life to the church without one sordid thought; while I will give my life to you. Try to think of me. Try to withdraw yourself from your saintly absorption long enough to think of a woman—a woman who loves you.

MAY STARLEIGH.

It was an amazing letter. Again the self-complacent look came smirking up, and was disgustedly suppressed. The letter surprised him much more than the fact, for simple and austere as he really was he could not help noticing the extreme devotions of pretty little Mrs. Starleigh, and he often wondered why it did not touch him more. Why he felt so dreadfully bored sometimes. Now here this was. What could he say?

Just a little feeling of disgust came into his thoughts. "What ailed the woman? Why couldn't she act like other women? Really that reference to her wealth was a trifle coarse. Jack Starleigh in his life had been a good fellow, and to drag him in to point a moral in that kind of a love letter to another man was, to say the least, doubtful taste. Well, he must answer it the best he could."

There are a great many elements in which a man and a minister do not essentially differ. Even a minister cannot always tell the bold truth.

The Rev. Mr. Fielding had prepared a great many sermons, over which his wrestling was easy work compared to this answer to Mrs. Starleigh's letter:

MY DEAR MRS. STARLEIGH,—You have given me a higher mark of your regard than a man often receives, and I appreciate it accordingly—appreciate while I deplore.

Many years ago I had a romance which came to a sudden, sharp and awful termination in the death of the girl I was about to marry a week before the day of the wedding. Since then I have carried a dead heart. All women are as shadows to me. Your grace, beauty and kindliness, while they have been immeasurably grateful, have touched no responsive chord. The lack has been mine, not yours. It hurts me deeply to say this. I wish it were different.—Sincerely your friend, ROBERT FIELDING.

He wiped the perspiration away as he completed it. The pleasant consciousness of his own attractions, which he had first experienced, had quite passed away and he felt baited and uncomfortable.

"It will be pleasant," he said savagely, "to meet at every turn a woman who has proposed to me and been rejected."

A woman can reject a man, and meet him afterwards to any extent with the greatest equanimity; in fact it adds quite a delightful little spice to life, and if by any wiles of dress or manner she can keep the wounds still gaping, she is not especially averse to doing it.

With a man, a chivalrous man, though, it is different. He has the idea so firmly ingrained in him that a woman should have whatever she wants that he feels like a great sheepish brute if he has to deny her, especially when she wants *him*.

The Rev. Mr. Fielding found the situation quite unbearable. He felt uncomfortable to a degree whenever he met her socially. The formal parishonal calls which he was obliged to make on account of the observers in the parish of St. Michael were purgatorial. Quite often when he was preaching his eyes accidentally met hers and he knew he blushed to the roots of his hair, and she——

There never was a dog labouring under anything which his conscience could not quite condone, that guilt did not stamp itself indelibly upon him; while the cat—did you ever see her look anything but innocent even with the cream on her whiskers?

There was but one alternative for him and that was to leave St. Michael's. He did it sorrowfully, this poor victim to his own graces of mind and body, for he loved St. Michael's.

Life ran monotonously in his new parish for many months; he sometimes almost missed blushing at Mrs. Starleigh, when one day a visitor from the old parish said:

"Oh, by-the-way, it is rumoured that little Mrs. Starleigh is to be married. It is a wonder to me that, considering her wealth and what a charming woman she is, it has not happened before."

Mr. Fielding paced his study that night until very late; finally he wrote nervously, desperately, the following terse letter:

MY DEAR MRS. STARLEIGH,—Is it true that you are to be married? ROBERT FIELDING.

The distinctively feminine answer came by return of post:

DEAR MR. FIELDING,—Why? MAY STARLEIGH.

At precisely eight o'clock the next evening Mr. Fielding rang Mrs. Starleigh's door-bell. He was no longer austere or saintly absorbed, but tremendously agitated. If he hadn't been a minister he would have said he was a fool.

She came to meet him as though she had seen him yesterday, which might or might not be encouraging. He blundered into the parlour in some sort of a foolish fashion, then came to his subject with deadly directness.

"I have no excuse to offer," he said; "do with me as you will, but are you to be married?"

"That depends," she replied.

"On what?"

"On you," was the blushing but explicit answer.

And the Reverend Mr. Fielding felt that possibly there might be happier men than himself, but undoubtedly there were not—which all goes to show that a man's "no" is no more to be depended upon than a woman's.

JEANNETTE E. DENTON.

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THE QUEEN'S MESSENGER.

"I DARE not tell even you, darling."

"I think it very cruel and unkind of you; you cannot love me, or you would trust me."

"My darling wife, don't be unreasonable; as a Queen's Messenger I am sworn to absolute secrecy."

"Yes, to the outside world, but what harm could there be in telling me? you know I wouldn't repeat it."

"I know you wouldn't, dearest. Come here and sit on my knee and tell me what makes you so anxious to know my destination this time. You never wanted to know before."

"I don't know what's the matter with me to-night. I feel uneasy, as if something dreadful were going to happen," placing a warm, soft arm around his neck. "Tell me, Alec, just tell me the nearest big town, and I shall know that you love me and trust me." The appeal was followed up by a tender kiss.

Mrs. Cranston threw her arms around her husband.

Mr. Alec Cranston rapidly came to the conclusion that the only way out of this affair with peace was by telling his wife a deliberate lie, and as his expected answer was urgent—he promptly replied:

"Well, Kate, if you must know, I'm going to Paris."

Having progressed so far with the lie, and seeing the marked success it achieved, he couldn't resist adding to it.

"What will you give me if I will tell you more?"

"You dear boy, I knew you would tell me, and I only wanted to know to see if you loved me sufficiently to trust me with so great a secret."

"Then you don't want to hear any more?"

"Only when to expect you home again, my husband."

With the perversity innate in humanity, Cranston was disappointed.

"It's rather a risky business this time."

"In what way, dear?"

"Well, I'll tell you. I am taking documents over to Paris about the extradition of that dynamitard Tynan."

"Then you shan't go, Alec."

Cranston regretted his anxiety to continue that lie.

"I've no alternative, dearest, I must go."

"Oh, Alec, I knew something dreadful was going to happen. It is that you will be murdered; those horrid wretches will throw bombs at you, and I shall never see you again."

Mrs. Cranston threw her arms around her husband and wept as if her heart would break, and made Cranston feel a perfect brute—in fact he couldn't bear it.

"Forgive me, Kate, I was only yarning. Dearest, believe me, I am only going to Berlin on a diplomatic errand of the commonest kind."

"No, I knew you only say that to try and relieve my mind," looking up as if some brilliant idea had occurred. "What station do you go from?"

"Station? Oh, Charing Cross, of course."

"Then I will come and see you safely off."

"That would never do, sweetheart. First of all I have to call at the Foreign Office—and, by-the-way, I must be off—and in the second and most important place, if anyone from that office saw you there, it would mean my dismissal with ignominy and dishonour."

"But if I didn't speak to you, or appear to know you, and only just watched you safely away?"

"No harm in that, dear, of course, but would it be worth all the trouble?"

"I should come home contented."

"Very well, love, that is a compact. Now give me a long, loving kiss that will last me three days."

"Oh, will you be back so soon? Well, that is comforting."

Instead of allowing the cabby to drive to the Foreign Office as directed in the presence and hearing of his wife, Cranston told him to make for Temple Lane as fast as he could. Dismissing the cab in Fleet Street, Cranston ran down Middle Temple Lane, made several snipe-like

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dodges round corners, and quickly arrived at the particular building he required, up the stair-case of which he raced with most unbarrister-like haste.

"Hullo, Cranston," cried the startled occupier of the top flight, on seeing that gentleman enter unannounced, "I made sure it was an urgent brief for to-morrow, and I was wondering whether my numerous engagements would permit me to take it, and what the fees would be."

"You're a rapid thinker, Walter, but listen. Are you busy?"

"Not particularly."

"Then you can do me a good turn. I've received marching orders again, and for some unearthly reason or other my wife got the fidgets and persisted in wanting to know where I was going. To get out of it I told her a cram, but like a fool said I was going to Paris about the dynamitards."

"And you've scared her?"

"Rather. I tried to explain that it was only in fun I had said it, but no—the long and short of it is, she says she is going to Charing Cross to see me safely off, but as I didn't tell her by what train I was going, it is doubtful if she turns up. She has promised faithfully, however, not to speak or even appear to recognise me. Now will you take this long ulster of mine and go and pretend you are me, and lend me yours; you can have it back on Friday morning? Go on to the platform as if you were going by the train."

"But there seems a power of mystery over nothing, Alec. If your wife isn't going to molest you, why not go yourself; can't you trust her, or are you frightened of the waterworks?"

"I am not going from Charing Cross at all."

"If you had said that at first now, I needn't have exercised my legal acumen to discover imaginary why's and wherefores. It shall be done, Alec Cranston. Take care of that coat and don't dog-ear the pocket-flaps."

"I am about to dissemble," mused Mr. Walter Driffield, as he prepared for the fray. "Must be uncommon awkward sometimes for married Queen's Messengers. If I were the Government I would make the beggars swear to celibacy, for a clever woman could turn a man inside out in half-an-hour. I suppose they are given sealed despatches on that account. I must give Cranston full credit though, it is a neat get-out of the difficulty, if she don't spot me, by-the-way. By Jove, suppose she breaks down, and throws her arms round me and—Holy Moses, I never thought of that. Anyway, here goes," and the briefless Walter Driffield, barrister-at-law, started on his errand of doing a friend a good turn.

As Driffield was about the same height and build as his friend, there was not much likelihood of anyone detecting him when he put the coat-collar up—it hid quite half his face—and, determined to carry out the scheme to the merest detail, Driffield promptly did what he considered would be Cranston's first action—entered the refreshment-room. Before his drink had been touched, however, a well-dressed, nicely spoken man came up to Driffield and putting a hand on his shoulder said:

"You've given me a fine chase, Mr. Cranston, but quick, I think there is time. I have an imperative message for you to go to the Foreign Office. I've been to your house, but they told me you had driven there, and I've been on a sort of wild goose chase."

Anxious to shield his friend, Driffield, despite his legal acumen, couldn't decide whether to say he was not Cranston or to let matters take their chance. Thinking it might only be a letter or something, Driffield finally decided to risk going as Cranston.

"You've given me a fine chase, Mr. Cranston."

"If we are sharp, sir, you will be able to get the train; I've a good cab waiting."

Once in the cab and driving at a daring pace considering the traffic, Driffield regained his senses somewhat, and although he was afraid his friend might get hauled over the coals, couldn't help chuckling to think of the sell there would be for somebody on arriving at Her Majesty's Foreign Office if he had to see any of the big-wigs.

"Do you object to the window being down, Mr. Cranston?" asked his urbane companion. "I have a very weak chest and this east wind plays havoc with me."

Driffield had no objection, and the clumsy window was accordingly let down, soon to be covered with the steam breathed upon them.

Just as the hansom reached the cross end of Whitehall Gardens, where the light is disgracefully dim, the messenger from the Foreign Office blew his nose violently, and mopped his face and eyes, as if in the throes of influenza. This gave occupation to his left hand only, the other being busily engaged in extracting something from a case in his overcoat pocket. Upon this being accomplished, the hand was swiftly withdrawn and a handkerchief saturated with liquid ammonia was dashed into Driffield's face, blinding and stupefying him instantly.

When Driffield recovered consciousness and was able to piece together the incidents prior to his being nearly suffocated, he found himself in a windowless room about twelve feet square, lighted by a lamp, suspended through a hole in the ceiling, similar to those in railway carriages, only that this one was paraffin. His next discovery, after crawling off the bed he had been laid on, was that the room was partially padded, but whether to prevent self-injury or as a deadener of sound Driffield was of course ignorant. The bed was the sole piece of furniture in the room, and was a unique specimen of a craftily devised preventive of self-inflicted injuries. In the ordinary

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acceptation of the term there was neither head nor foot to it, and the parts usually hard were carefully covered with some soft material.

Such suggestive surroundings would scare most men, and Driffield was no exception. It was the uncertainty, the suspense, and feeling of dread that unnerved him, nor did he feel any easier in his mind when he noticed a sliding panel open near the ceiling, disclosing the lower features of a masked face. Only a few minutes elapsed, and three semi-masked individuals noiselessly entered the room.

Driffield's whole body quivered with rage, like a freshly trapped panther, and possessing extraordinary strength, could have swept the three intruders aside like straws, but to his agony saw they were each armed with a revolver.

"Sit down, Mr. Cranston, we intend no violence, at least, unless you decline to listen to reason. We have not taken the liberty of searching you, preferring to allow a gentleman of your position to avoid that disgrace, but we must insist upon your giving up at once all the papers and documents you were to have taken to Paris."

"You have made a great mistake; I am not Mr. Cranston at all."

"Come, sir, you surely know the world better than to think that desperate men like us can be bluffed that way!"

A handkerchief saturated with liquid ammonia was dashed into Driffield's face.

"Who are you?"

"Well! we call ourselves patriots!"

"Nihilists or Fenians?"

"Ah, it makes no matter which; we are all brothers, striving for one common end."

Up to this, one only of the three had spoken, as if elected as the spokesman, but another now interfered, and speaking with a strong foreign accent, and in a somewhat sneering tone said:

"Ve vaste much good time, *mes amis*."

"Yes, that is true," acquiesced the first speaker. "Mr. Cranston, I must ask you without any further procrastinating to give up your despatches."

"And I tell you, you are a pack of fools and have got the wrong man. I've no despatches! If you think I have—have a search for them."

The tone was anything but conciliatory, and the hitherto silent member of the trio immediately crossed the room and picked up the ulster, looked inside the collar, shrugged his shoulders and exclaimed:

"If you are not Mr. Cranston, why do you wear his coat?"

"It is his coat, I'll admit."

"And," producing a handkerchief from one of the pockets and reading "A. Cranston" on it, "you use his handkerchiefs for the same purpose, no doubt?

"We've tried persuasion and it has failed, now you shall have five minutes' grace, and unless you give up those documents within that time you will be searched."

"Might is right here I suppose," remarked Driffield, who was beginning to understand the situation.

And searched he was, the muzzle of a revolver being pointed at him during the operation. Each letter and odd bit of paper was examined and scrutinised with the utmost care, but on finishing without discovering those all-important despatches, the tempers of the three "brothers" slackened considerably.

"You have evidently got them concealed somewhere about you, Mr. Cranston. Again I ask you will you give them up, or is your clothing to be ripped to rags?"

"I have already told you, I don't know how many times, that I am not Mr. Cranston and have no documents or papers—except those you've seen, and look at those envelopes, you'll find them addressed to Walter Driffield, The Temple, and I am the Walter Driffield."

"We've had enough of this fooling, Mr. Cranston. I must now ask you to undress."

"That I absolutely refuse to do."

"Refusal means a repetition of your sensations in the cab last night, remember."

There was no alternative, but as a last protest Driffield said:

"If you will leave the room, and bring me something to put on, I will."

"You shall have my dressing-gown, sir, but you must disrobe here in our presence—you might swallow some

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palatable piece of information when our backs were turned. We will take care of your money and jewellery."

Driffield imagined it would take a long time to "rip his clothes to rags," but evidently there were professional pickers on the premises, for two of the original trio soon returned.

"As we have found nothing secreted about your clothing, Mr. Cranston, the reason is obvious, your instructions were evidently verbal. As soon as we leave the room, it will become absolutely dark, and will remain so until you call out that you are prepared to divulge your secret."

The room was perfectly dark, and not a sound penetrated from the outside world.

* * * * *

Despite Cranston's statement as to the improbability of his wife turning up at the station, she did, and saw her husband, as she thought, instead of taking train *en route* to Paris, quickly leave the station with some other man, and drive off in a hansom cab. Had her purse been more heavily weighted she would have followed that cab, for her suspicions were aroused, but as it was she had to be contented with noticing that the enamel plate at the rear of the cab was broken in such a manner as to leave the number a matter of conjecture. Debating as to her going straight home and upon the deceitfulness of men generally, she stood at one of the entrances of the station just as the real Mr. Cranston made his appearance. Taken so utterly by surprise she gave a little scream, but, suddenly remembering her promise, tried to look innocent. Cranston laughed.

"Trust you, indeed!" he said, still laughing.

"But, Alec, where have you come from, and am I to know you?" in a tone of bewilderment.

Three semi-masked individuals.

"Yes, little woman, it is quite safe fortunately. I thought I might be in time in case you did come to see me off. You see my marching orders have been postponed for a week."

"But, Alec dearest," still puzzled, "where's your coat and whose have you got on?"

"Oh, of course, that accounts for it; I had forgotten I met Driffield, and he was up to one of his larks and we exchanged."

"Then it must have been him I saw drive off just now?"

"In all probability it was. Now what do you say to doing a theatre now we are here, and a nice bit of supper somewhere after?"

"You dear boy; but look at me."

"Well—oh, hang the clothes. If not the best dressed you will be the handsomest woman there, so you needn't mind."

"Oh, you gave me such a turn, sir!"

It was considerably after midnight when Mr. and Mrs. Cranston returned home, and their reception was anything but cordial, the maid-servant giving a positive yell when she saw her master. Of course, such odd behaviour necessitated inquiries, and Martha, somewhat flustered, said:

"Oh, you gave me such a turn, sir, I thought you had gone to Paris."

"Indeed, who told you I was going there?"

"Nobody, sir, that is I thought——"

"Quite so, you were listening at the door. Well, you can go in the morning, as early as you like."

The whirring tinkle of an electric bell awoke the Cranston's during the night. After satisfying himself that it was the street bell, Alec slipped on a few things and went downstairs.

"Your front door was open, Mr. Cranston." The voice proceeded from a police officer.

"Was it?" he replied, slightly mystified. "I closed and fastened it myself last night. Just wait here a moment."

To use a slang expression—Queen's Messengers are awkward nuts to crack, either physically or otherwise, and practice makes them quick at taking in situations. Cranston dashed up to the servant's room and satisfied himself that Martha had gone, then as rapidly ran down to his own room, switched on a light, and to the terror of his wife began dressing as if life and death were at stake. They were, and he knew it. He quickly explained to his wife the arrangement of his with Driffield, and

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Cranston commenced a terrific onslaught on the door.

his fears, and she, although terribly frightened, remembered about the broken plate on the cab. In less than five minutes Cranston returned to the policeman, told him to keep an eye on the house, and vanished down the street, much to the man's amazement.

Luck befriended him in the form of a good cab and a better horse, which was soon flying along the empty streets at a pace that made the few belated pedestrians that were about stop and stare after it. Arrived at Charing Cross Station, Cranston stood near the few dilapidated conveyances that were there, and called out in a voice loud enough to be heard in Fleet Street:

"Which of you drivers wants to earn a sovereign?"

The effect was magical; there appeared to be five drivers for every cab.

"Do any of you know the driver of a hansom that has the tail-plate broken: it was here about 7 o'clock last night?"

No, there wasn't one of them knew. One old stager informed Cranston that they were night workers only.

"Wait a bit," suggested one. "I shouldn't wonder but what old Larry'd know 'un."

"Where is he?" asked Cranston eagerly.

"At the corfee stall by Morley's."

Cranston immediately ran off, telling his Jehu to follow.

"A' coorse I knows 'un. Where does 'e live? Back o' Guilford Street."

A sovereign placed in old Larry's palm quickened his memory in a marvellous manner, and he and Alec were soon off to the back of Guilford Street.

There was some doubt at first, old Larry being very uncertain as to the exact house. After a few minutes' careful examination of the bricks of one house, however, he drew Alec's attention to having found the right one, emphasising the statement with an oath. Finding nothing handier, Cranston commenced a terrific onslaught on the door with the butt end of a revolver, the first glimpse of which sent cold chills up Mr. Larry's back-bone. He made sure he had brought trouble for his pal. Suddenly an upper window was opened.

"Hello! hello! hello! we don't want no bloomin' earthquikes 'ere. Wot's this 'ere abart?"

"Come down quick, Bill, this 'ere gent wants ter see yer."

"So I should bloomin' well think," sagely remarked Bill, as his head vanished.

"You drove two gentlemen from Charing Cross station last night."

"Well, an' wot if I did?"

"I'll give you five pounds if you can take me to the house."

"Wot's this 'ere game?"

"Never mind now, time is flying; I can tell you on the way. Put a coat on—be smart."

On the way to New Scotland Yard, Bill was told all that was good for him to know, and he explained how the gent in the black coat had ordered him in King William Street to go to the station and wait. He further explained that his first instructions were to drive to the Foreign Office, but were changed to Bleat Street, Lambeth, where he took them.

Quite a procession of hansoms crossed Westminster Bridge just as Big Ben solemnly struck five—a procession of three. When the foremost arrived at George Street it stopped, as did the other two. The late occupants then walked down Bleat Street about twenty yards to an entry on the right, where half-a-dozen policemen were lying *perdu*. They had received their instructions at the Lambeth station by telephone. The inspector in command divided his forces, some going to cut off the retreat at the back, while the remainder walked straight to No. 9, front entrance.

The noise woke up the neighbours, but made no impression on those within No. 9, and finally the door had to be forced open.

The birds had flown; signs were not wanting to show the haste the late tenant had been in to vacate his domicile, but not a trace was left that could give the police the merest shadow of a clue.

Cranston and the inspector directed their search for Driffield, and were some time in finding him, but their efforts were finally rewarded.

"You were right, sir; that slavey of yours must have been in the swim, and given them the tip," remarked the inspector, while the men were still searching; "but, although they've got away now, I think we can pretty well tell whose work it is."

What a talk Driffield and the Cranstons had that day. Driffield was certain they would have tortured him to death, and of course Mrs. Cranston reminded Alec dear that she knew something dreadful was going to happen.

C. England Cowan.

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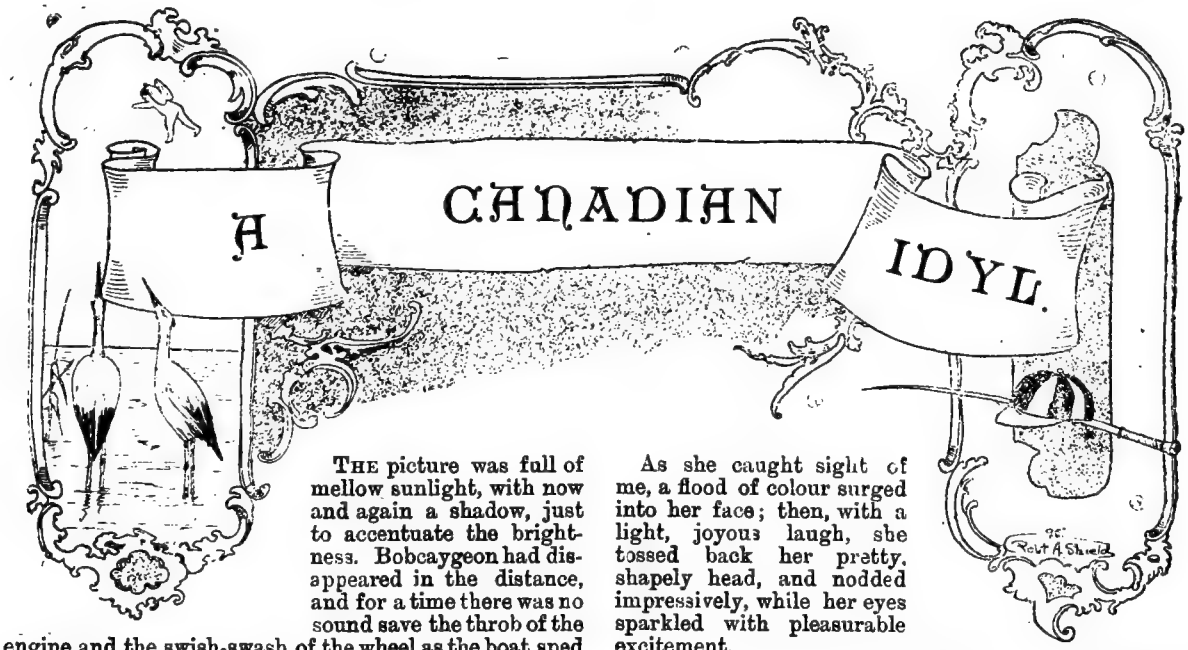

THE picture was full of mellow sunlight, with now and again a shadow, just to accentuate the brightness. Bobcaygeon had disappeared in the distance, and for a time there was no sound save the throb of the engine and the swish-swash of the wheel as the boat sped along through the clear waters of Sturgeon lake.

Two old women, who sat close together and talked in whispers to each other, were, beside myself, the only passengers aboard. Here and there we slipped past cool summer retreats, in their settings of green trees, with grassy lawns, rolling far back out of sight. There was a medley of bird notes in the air, and the fresh aromatic scent of the pines floated in upon the breeze.

"Yo' fust trip to Ontario?" asked the captain, seating himself on a camp-stool near by.

"Yes; I am spending a week or so at Bobcaygeon, for the fishing."

"Fine sport about here. Think I seen you an' the Scotchman out together day befo' yistiddy, if I don't mistake. Stoppin' at the Forest House, ain't you?"

"Well, I have a room at the Forest House, and drop in occasionally for meals; but I confine myself generally to fish diet. McDougal is a capital cook as well as fisherman, and he serves up the trout fresh from the water. I tell you what, they are fine."

"Ah, sir," he vouchsafed, "Canady is a great country—a big country, an' the fish an' the timber is prime; they can't be beat. But here we are at last. The Injun village is just about half a mile back. Keep to the path an' you can't miss it. You won't see much when you fin' it, howsomever—nothin' thar but dorgs an' half-breeds."

In another instant I found myself alone in the woods with no human habitation in sight. Everyone at Bobcaygeon had urged a visit to the Indian village, and I supposed I should find it along the regular line of traffic.

While I sat on a log, deliberating with myself as to my next move, a canoe touched the shore, and for one brief moment a young girl stood in it, lithe and supple, outlined against the quivering reeds. Her slim brown ankles peeped from under her crimson skirt, a blue shawl fluttered around her, and a yellow kerchief was knotted about her black hair. She looked like some bright, tropical bird poised for flight.

As she caught sight of me, a flood of colour surged into her face; then, with a light, joyous laugh, she tossed back her pretty, shapely head, and nodded impressively, while her eyes sparkled with pleasurable excitement.

"She is as beautiful as a picture, and I should like to frame her just as she stands," was my mental comment, but I lifted my hat and spoke to her in a matter-of-fact tone.

"I want to go to the Indian village, but have lost my way," I said. "Will you please direct me to it?"

"And why do you care to go there?" she asked, as she secured the canoe to the bank. "There is nothing to see. It is detestable."

She had come up very near me while she spoke, and now dropped down upon the log beside me as though it were quite the thing to do.

"Mamma and I, we have lived there since my father died," she went on, "for after he fell and hurt himself he could do no more work, and mamma was ill, so they were very, very poor. You know my father was half-Indian, and his father was a chief—a great chief. Once I saw him dressed up to see the Prince of Wales when he came over here. The old man had on his war paint, with feathers in his hair, and his blanket round him. I was little, and afraid of him, and I cried loud."

"Is your mother an Indian too?"

"Oh no! she is thoroughly French."

She raised her daintily pencilled brows and brought the tips of her fingers together with a tragic little gesture. She spoke English without an accent, but ever and anon, apparently unconsciously, glided into French, with which she seemed more conversant.

"Have you always lived in the village?" I inquired, with as small regard for the conventionalities as she herself displayed.

She looked at me deprecatingly through her silky lashes, and laughed a mocking little laugh.

"What an idea!" she cried. "I would now be dead if that were so. It is not life here. It is only to breathe like this"—and she sighed audibly.

Then for a while she was silent, with her eyes fixed on the water in a musing, dreamy gaze.

"Ah, monsieur, that marriage was a great mistake," she announced at last, facing me suddenly; "my father

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and mother. He had only his handsome face, and mamma was an orphan—and now see how we must work. *Sans doute*, Jean is much better as a husband."

"Who is Jean?" I asked.

"Ah, Jean!" with a shrug of her dainty shoulders. "Jean? He is—but it is time to go. Mamma will be waiting for me, and unless I work to-day I will have no baskets to sell to-morrow. Won't you come along with me?"

I needed no second invitation, and we strolled away side by side. The fields lay steeped in golden sunshine, the sky was as blue as a summer harebell, and the air full of a strange, soft radiance. The mellow tones of a distant church bell drifted across the water, and fainter yet fainter, floated on and on, until the last echo had hidden itself in the reeds along the shore.

"Won't you tell me about Jean?" I persisted.

"Why, Jean—Jean! I'm going to marry Jean next month," she told me, while a swift blush dyed her face.

"Then Jean is a very fortunate fellow," I replied. "But who is he? Where is he?"

In the silence that ensued I had time to study her face. There was passion lurking in her dusky eyes, and the crimson burned under the olive of her cheeks.

"Ah!" she said presently, with a quick turn of her head that brought to mind a little robin red-breast, "you English, monsieur, you think too much of marriage—*ce n'est pas le fin*. There is much afterwards. Should I wish Pierre to see me when I am ill, and old, and ugly? He will wear me in his heart, and there I shall always be young and beautiful.

"And perhaps—Bah! how I hate work! When I should like to float on the lake and dream, it is mamma that cries that I must gather birch-bark and sweet hay for more baskets and workboxes. Then, too, I have to dye the quills with which to trim them; and Jean, he has a house, and a cow, and two horses, and three thousand dollars," pausing impressively as she enumerated each piece of property. "But Pierre is only a soldier. *Ma foi!* But he is a fine fellow—tall and straight, like a young tree, and such big blue eyes."

"Do you love Pierre?" I queried.

"Well, yes," with a touch of resignation in her tone.

"And you say he loves you, too?"

There was a slight quiver about her rosy lips, and she laughed a tuneless little laugh.

"Yes," she answered, "but what is the good of that, monsieur? He is poor—so poor—only a soldier, with a sword and a uniform, and——" she gazed up at me with her lustrous eyes that were dark and flashing, like the eyes of the women of Seville.

There was a wondrous blending of softness and fire in her face, and I marvelled as I looked at her, why the eccentric brain of this dainty, bird-like creature, innocent of any knowledge of angles and triangles, should fly off at a tangent, busy with the problem of life that is so difficult of solution.

We were in sight of her small cottage now, with the waving millet up to its very door. It looked like a tiny island in a big, restless sea.

"One must live, monsieur," she announced, parenthetically, with an impatient little *moue*, "and see, this is not life. Pierre, he spoke to me the day before he went away, but I knew he loved me before he said a word. There was something in his eyes when he looked into mine that cried out so loud that I thought everybody must hear it, and when he kissed me that first time, and said, 'Lorita, I love you,' it was all old to me even then, and I laughed, but something was laying on my heart like a great weight. *Ah, que je suis folle!* Why do I talk to you so? But what could I do? I should never have a new dress when I would be the wife of Pierre, and then—*ah, bon Dieu!* A soldier's buttons are so bright, and pretty girls smile at him, and as for me, why I would be at home cooking and scrubbing, and—and ta, ta. Jean, he is ugly and safe, and it is much better so."

The quiet decision, the cool, calm dignity of her remarks—their audacity was staggering. I passed my hand across my eyes, and looked at her again as she threaded her way in front of me along the narrow path.

"And next month you are to marry Jean," I said, as we reached the cottage door. "I believe you will change your mind yet, and take Pierre. I would, if I were you."

She shook her head and tapped the ground impatiently with one of her arched brown feet.

"*Non, non*," she asserted emphatically. "I am not a coquette. I will marry Jean." And she raised her eyebrows ever so little.

"May I come to see you again before I leave? I hope Jean is not jealous."

"He could not be of you," she cried, laughing, and flashing back one of her radiant smiles, as she looked at me with those mischievous, haunting eyes.

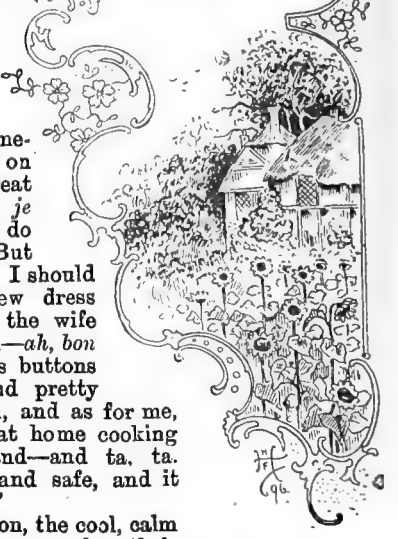
The captain had spoken truly. There was, indeed, little of interest to see at the village. The Indians (all half-breeds) were lazy, shiftless creatures, weak imitations of the white man.

"I am disappointed," I said to the shopkeeper, who was lounging in the door, with his stiff black hair pomadoured. "I came here expecting to find wigwams, wampum, and war-paint."

The man laughed.

"You might not have got home with your scalp," he replied, "if that were so."

The children stared at me stolidly, some half-grown boys were playing baseball, and in the back of the shop



POST-CARD COMPETITION. No. 24.

What is the longest sentence in this number (excluding serials) in which the last letter of each word corresponds with the first in the next. Example: "Valdo *of few words said* don't." Usual conditions. *Post-cards only.*

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I heard a baby crying. After buying a half-dozen baskets and tiny birch-bark canoes (I had engaged as many more from Lorita,) I turned my face to the lake.

Lorita and her mother—a bright-faced, Frenchy little woman—were engaged in an animated discussion as I neared their cottage, and I passed by unobserved. As I went down the little path between the millet I heard Lorita laugh, and there was a suggestion in it of the carol of a bird.

"So she is going to marry Jean for his money," kept running through my mind like a refrain, "because he owns a house, a cow, two horses, and three thousand dollars."

It was the same old strain, on a lower key. Women have sold themselves since the world began, but the blank dreariness of the girl's future appalled me.

I tossed away my cigar in disgust.

Two days later I received a letter calling me home unexpectedly, and the evening before my departure I went to bid Lorita good-bye.

The girl—she was scarcely more than a child—attracted me, interested me. Such quaint, sordid axioms from such guileless lips!

The air was fresh with that delicious fragrance of the woods after a shower, and the mist, like a grey spectre, floated up from the lake, and away. The odour of birch-bark and sweet hay seemed to hang about the cottage, like a visible presence, and the rustling millet nodded and whispered without ceasing.

In the doorway I found Lorita, pale and troubled, but she extended to me a brown, delicately-modelled little hand as I paused upon the steps, and greeted me with her characteristic, insouciant smile. Then her beautiful face, as capricious as an April day, again relapsed into sadness.

"Ah, it is too bad," she began, with a sob in her voice, "that it should happen so. Jean, he tries to please me. He came yesterday to bring the great trunk of wedding clothes from Montreal. You see, I would have it so, for it is there that we used to live, and there is nothing to buy at Bobcaygeon."

She spoke so rapidly that her words tripped over one another, in their undue haste.

"Such silks and laces, monsieur. Ah, but I shall look like a princess with them on"—with a fleeting smile, and a bird-like poise of her head. "But mamma and I were looking through them, and Jean, who insisted that he must see, too, he sat down beside us, and in a moment he was asleep: Bah! only fancy! And he snored frightfully, but that was all the better, for then we might say what we liked, and mamma was sure that one dress was *bon marché*, for there was a spot as big as your button under the top ruffle."

With an unmirthful, pathetic laugh, she added:

"It was hidden, indeed, snug away, but mamma found it, for her eyes are sharp. Then I put on my wedding gown and pinned on the long white veil, monsieur, and I looked beautiful, like the little Mother in the church and when I turned from the mirror Pierre was standing in the door just here. The sun was shining on the buttons of his jacket, and he was where you are now, with his arms stretched out to me and his eyes half shut, under the shadow of his cap.

"Mamma was gone to show some lace to a neighbour, and I did not speak, but—but—what say you?

"The veil is not hurt, and it is dry again, but Pierre's tears and mine, ah, they fell on it very fast

"Suddenly he saw Jean—poor Jean!

"His mouth was open, so—and his nose was red like a cherry, and while he snored Pierre looked down at him and clinched his fists, and under my lace my heart was aching—throbbing."

Her bright changeful face grew soft and tender as she spoke, and the rosy glow deepened on her cheeks.

"Ah, well, Pierre, he was gone when mamma came back, and you know Jean is rich—very rich—but something aches so here in my breast."

"So you are surely going to marry Jean next month? Good-bye, Lorita," I said, turning to go.

A sunbeam quivered across her exquisite face, and lingered lovingly in the tearful black eyes.

"It is better so," she answered, with a pitiful effort at a smile. "Pierre, he is gone away now, and—*bon Dieu!* The wedding dress is very fine! It is real brocade, mamma says—ah, it is destiny, monsieur—destiny!"

As I reached the gate I heard her sobbing, and looking back I saw her, with arms outstretched, like a broken bright-hued lily, lying across the threshold.

I scarcely knew whether to weep or smile.

PAULINE SHACKLEFORD COLYAR.

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The Last King of Atlantis

OR,

The Romance of a Lost Continent.

By **Geo. C. Wallis,** Author of *The Winning of Gunhild,* etc.

CHAPTER XX.

In Quest of Quitzaal.

On the morrow I sought out Marenso. I told him who our prisoner was, and, as briefly as I could, the story of our illicit love. He listened gravely, interposing sundry headshakes into his silence, and when I asked his counsel regarding my duty, answered, after long communing with himself, that the Princess must go before the Queen as a prisoner and a rebel, and receive from the royal lips her sentence. To this I agreed, as it had been in my mind to do the same, for it is a coward's act to slay a helpless woman, however dangerous she may be.

"Then into your charge I commit our fair prisoner," said I, "and shall trust you to take her safely to court. It would be well were you to set out on the return journey with most of the troops at once, as with a chosen band I intend to track down Quitzaal before I go back."

"A foolish plan," said Marenso regretfully. "If the white rebels are destroyed, there are teeming hosts of Red Barbarians left in their trackless woods."

"None but what have heard or will hear of our prowess," I said, "and few who came against us yesterday will dare to face us again. Give me five hundred stout-hearted, well-armed men, and I will wager to capture this runaway Governor, and bring him down to the coast in safety."

"Well, well," he replied, "your blood is young blood and mine is old, much as I rejoice in the sound of war! Have your way and I will go; but let your force be a thousand strong, and let Valdo and Atris go with you. Then only shall I dare to meet the Queen alone."

To these conditions I consented, and the day but two following, having by then buried our dead and razed the town to the ground—excepting the pyramid, wherein we placed the corpses of Alcis, Cuzcon, and others who had done nobly in the fight—and shared up the food and spoil, our forces parted, Marenso, with 24,000 men, beginning his march to the coast, and I, with the other thousand and my two lieutenants, striking out and following the trail of the Ulmecs, with whom Quitzaal had last been seen.

For some distance our way led through level country intersected by little rippling water courses, through forests where the air was heavy with the rich perfume of summer flowers and the crisp scent of dry timber. In places we found clearings where once had been a settlement, now abandoned or used only as a burial ground, where the bodies were interred, as is the native custom, in a sitting posture.

One of these places of the dead we saw not far from our camp, and there, it seemed, had been hurriedly interred many of the slain in the recent battle, put into the ground in the usual way, but with many of the heads sticking out of the soft earth, some scratched and dragged out and gnawed and mangled fearfully by the roaming denizens of the forest—the tiger-cats and wolfish wild dogs that made night hideous with their howlings and barkings.

A gruesome spot it was, even in the daylight hours, with its skull-like brows projecting from the soil in silent horror, chawed and chavelled out of all likeness to humanity; with its polished bones lying scattered about, rooted up by the sharp claws of the beasts and cleaned of every scrap of flesh by their savage fangs; with its many useless and broken weapons, chiefly knives and swords of obsidian, that hard transparent stone, so common in that country; with its mute but telling evidence of sad defeat

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and carnage. Quickening our pace, we left the grim spectacle behind as soon as possible.

Our course now lay through fields of maize and beans and fertile stretches of fruit-plants and productive trees; through districts rich in amber, cocoa, cochineal, and lime; round hillsides bored with tunnels, where dusky workers delved for lead and tin and copper, and here and there for silver and turquoise stones; and further on, still following the trail of the fleeing Ulmecs—which was easily traced by their footprints, the state of the fruit crops and the white ashes of their camp fires—we came to rising ground again, climbing out of the valley up one of its southern slopes, meeting on our upward journey the pines and larches and oaks that told of the chill air of that higher altitude. Now and again we crossed a foaming torrent, swollen by

Fell headlong into the horrible depths.

recent rains, getting over on rude wooden bridges laid from rock to rock. It taxed our nerves to the utmost to walk along those rough-hewn logs, poised so lightly on the points of rock that jutted sheer out of the boiling flood beneath; but, save three who fell off and were swept away in the rapid currents, we made the transits in safety.

Anon we passed by mighty ruins, half buried beneath dense forests; palaces crumbling to dust; temples with grinning, sculptured idols before altars covered with nearly effaced bas-reliefs; houses of granite, black and rose-colour, rough and polished, all falling to decay, overgrown with twining creepers and rank weeds, resplendent with the gay flashing of the brightly-plumaged birds and resonant with the tuneful notes of the sweeter-voiced, if less gaudy, songsters of the shade. What race of men was it that built these fast-declining edifices, so soon to be blotted out of existence by the ruthless hand of Time?

'Tis a riddle that the centuries may not answer. The few Huacans we captured on our journey could tell us no more concerning them than that it was a tradition of their tribe that long ago their forefathers, the first Huacans, had driven these unknown people, who came from the land to the west, beyond the sea—out of the valley to a country further south, as the Ulmecs might some day drive them. When asked why Quitzaal and the Ulmecs with him had gone south instead of north to their own nation, our prisoners answered very ingenuously: because the white chief thought to evade any pursuit, expecting we should strike northward. Up to now I had had several brushes with the natives, who fought in the undergrowth instead of facing us in the open, covering themselves with leaves so as to be invisible while pouring in a volley of arrows, but after getting all the knowledge I could out of the captives I set them at liberty, with a word to their fellows that I wanted the white chief Quitzaal only, and that when he was once in my clutches I would leave the land to them. From that time, with such amazing quickness news spreads in those desolate wilds, our march was unmolested.

Continuing our journey on the plateau we reached after leaving the lovely valley, we found that at length the fugitives had wind of our coming, and were pressing forward with greater speed and caution, though it could avail them little, being then but a day's distance ahead. At last we came to a halt on the brink of a deep cleft in the ground that extended to either side of us as far as our gaze could reach. It was a gorge too wide to warrant the hazard of a leap, and yet so narrow in proportion to its depth that it seemed but a long, deep gash in the earth, as though some giant had drawn his blade across the old world's face, leaving an ugly mark behind. At the bottom of this precipitous rift ran a river, reduced to our eyes, by the giddy height, to a brawling stream. A couple of huge trees, growing at the very top, whose gnarled boughs interlocked, were the only means of passage over this fearsome obstacle.

"Quitzaal and his band must have passed over," I said; "and what others can do, so can we. I, for one, shall cross. You, Atris, with five hundred men, I shall leave here to guard the place, on which the safety of our return depends, the rest must follow me."

So saying, I wasted no further time, but securing my weapons firmly, began to climb the massive trunk of the nearmost tree, and up into its stout branches, until I firmly grasped the twining arms of the further giant oak. Here, amongst the scant foliage I paused and looked down into the awful abyss that yawned beneath. There the great river flowed like a thin line of shining silver, inlaid in dark, dull ebony, and the sound of its rolling, as it washed its rocky bed, floated faintly to my ears, like the far-off sighing of a summer breeze.

Some might have lost head and dizzily fallen, but Phrena the Iron-Fingered was not of them, and so I came across in safety. After me Valdo cautiously crept, warily averting his eyes from the emptiness beneath, and he, too, reached the far side. Then others followed, though hesitatingly and grumblingly, till a score stood with us on the coveted brink. When the twenty-third man had nearly reached the middle, however, he looked down with morbid curiosity, trembled a second on his lofty perch like an aspen, strove in vain to keep his hold, and then, with a piercing cry of despair, unloosed his fingers, and fell headlong into the horrible depths. Down, down he sank like a stone, his armour-clad form flashing in the sunlight like a falling star as he descended between those frowning walls of living rock, and plunged into the swiftly-flowing torrent beneath. Breathlessly we peered over the dread verge and saw his body disappear, the only sound that reached us being a tiny splash, as of a little pebble idly thrown in a purling brook.

Now the rest hung back, fearful of his fate, but came on

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at my urging till forty were over, when another missed foothold and fell like the first, with a shriek of terror, into the fast-rolling flood at the base of the silent cliffs. Then they refused, one and all, to stir one step on that bridge, nor could I, either by threats, or entreaties, or curses, or badinage, or sneers, make them alter their resolution.

"Stay there, then, for ever, cowards, men with the hearts of women! Stay there till you rot as you stand!" I cried in anger. "I and this brave company will pursue our quest though the very spirits bar our way. You, Atris, leave them and come with me, lest you be disgraced by the taint of their foolish weakness."

Izitla's lover obeyed as though he had been told to go aboard a ship, and when he joined us I gave the word and we continued our journey without so much as a moment's pause to give the faint hearts time to screw up their courage, soon getting out of their sight, and quickly picking up the trail of the rebels. The chase was now further in front than before, and it was with difficulty that we made it out as it wound through dense thickets of cypress and clustering groves of cedar, through belts of fragrant pine, over bare and storm-swept spaces, down shrub-fringed gullies, and up the steep sides of snow-clad mountain spurs.

More than one startling adventure and narrow escape we had on those ice-bound ridges and overhanging crests of sparkling crystal; more than one hairbreadth saving from slips that would have sent us churning up the crusted snow down glittering slopes on our way to white-hung, death-still hollows opening out in awing vastness underneath our feet! The men I had, brave as they were, often wished I would turn back, but doggedly I held on. I had not got so far for nothing, and where the foe could find a footway so could we; therefore on we went through that region of rock-waste and snowy solitude, with mountains piled on mountains towering round us, white-mantled, tapering peaks jutting up into the cold, clear blue of the sky on every side, bare, black, rounded hills and sharp angular crags, strewn about in inextricable confusion, soaring heights and yawning depths in close proximity, precipices sheer and slanting ledges winding side by side, cloud-draped summit and mist-filled valleys lying near together, and over all, the calm, chill stillness of eternal peace, broken only now and then by the hoarse cries of the eagles and condors that whirled in wheeling flight high above the dreary scene.

With feelings of relief we left that icy land behind, and after travelling for many days along a level sandy country, came to the refuge that the fugitives were making for, and ran them to earth as well-trained dogs tire out and run down their fleeter-footed quarry. It was in a region more desolately grand, more melancholy, yet more vast, than any tract of mother earth that I have seen in all my wanderings.

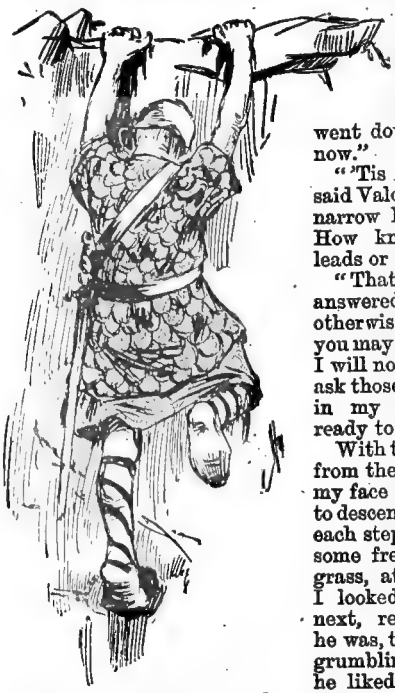
Imagine, if you can, an arid table-land of lime and sandstone rock, breeze-blown, and scantily covered with vegetation, broken up in all directions by gaping cracks and fissures, thousands of cubits deep and inaccessibly steep, with rivers rolling over gritty beds at the bottom of these great ravines; imagine, wherever a depression was that could be called a valley, sloping paths that led from height to height, seeming, on the great, square-shouldered earth masses, like lines drawn with a finely-pointed spear.

Imagine these valleys to be few but the dark, awesome gorges many, and think of these as cut sheer down through alternating layers of limestone crag and ruddy sandstone cliff, with strata of shale and clay between, and think of these soft beds as worn away by wet and weather into deep, delving ledges and rounded caves, on which, and in which, houses, forts, and towns, were built and peopled by a strange, retiring race of dusky natives. Imagine these smooth, bare cliffs, darkly facing each other, to be dotted by rudely cut footholds and spider-webbed by long, frail ladders fastened to the stone, by which dangerous and tedious means these people reached their rat-like haunts and descended to the narrow strip of sand at the river's edge beneath; imagine here and there along the ledges, on jutting curvatures of rock and along the skyward brinks of the highways of this land, dense clumps and belts of mammoth cedars larger than are grown elsewhere on earth; picture to yourself all this and you will know what manner of country it was* wherein Quitzaal sought safety, and wherein he found it not.

Up one of the winding, thread-like paths we had wearily toiled at the close of a dry and scorching day, under a sky of pitiless blue, and exhausted, outworn, were preparing to make a blissful sleep in the welcome shades of night, when, advancing to the edge of a chasm that opened out not many paces from our camping place, I saw, looking down, a sight that gladdened my heart and made me forget my weariness.

Along a narrow ledge which, starting from where I stood, wound down by long, slow gradations, the rebel Governor and a hundred Ulmecs were softly stealing, one by one, and one by one vanishing into the black darkness that already filled the lower depths, though on the mountain tops the red twilight still lingered. I watched them disappear into the rising mist of night, then called the others together, and told them what I had seen and the plan I had formed.

"We must follow them under cover of the night," I said. "They would see us in the light of to-morrow, and pick us off with arrows, one after another, as we went down. We must go now."



My other foot found a hole.

"'Tis a daring thing," said Valdo, "to descend the narrow ledge in the night. How know we where it leads or how it ends?"

"That we shall find," I answered, "if we go—not otherwise. I go, and lead; you may or may not follow; I will not command; I only ask those who dare, to tread in my footsteps and be ready to act as I wish."

With that I swung myself from the edge, and, keeping my face to the cliff, began to descend crabwise, making each step sure by clutching some fresh root, or tuft of grass, at every movement. I looked up. Atris came next, reckless fellow that he was, then Valdo, though grumbling as he came that he liked it not, then half a score of the soldiers, and then no more.

"Stay where you are till our return, weak hearts," I said, as low as I could talk, "and fear not for our safety till you see us brought up dead!"

Then the night closed round us also, and down into the unknown deep we crept, step by step, pace by pace, feeling our way along that slanting projection in the midst of silence solemn and darkness profound. Down—down—I went, the others creeping after with many a whispered word of caution and courage, till, when I thought we had travelled leagues upon leagues of distance, my right foot, extended onward for its next step, trod on empty air, and I realised that the ledge came to an abrupt end.

"Halt!" I passed on the word to my comrades; and reflecting that if our enemies had gone down here, we, too, must find a way. After a moment's pause I went down on

*The Cliff-Dwellings of Southern Mexico, now deserted

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my knees there in the awful, silent blackness, slowly let my body over the edge of the projecting rock, and kicked about with my feet for a foothold which would tell me that a rough stairway here led further down. It was a terrible moment, and but that I knew the strength of my iron-grasp, I should not have held on so long. As it was, finding the cliff-face hard and smooth, and discovering no inlet for my foot to rest upon, I faltered for a space and, hanging there, looked up.

Night had now fallen alike on mountain-tops and in the darkening hollows, but above my head—it seemed a great way off—a narrow riband of golden stars shone out on a ground of inky black, gleaming and twinkling down upon me in merry unconcern, each glittering point of light standing out from its neighbours as I had seen them in my vision of Isis. Like a lightning flash my thoughts passed from that vision to the words of Unim, the priest, that he had twice told me in the Sacred Grotto of the Sleeper: "Till thou hast been here a third time, fear not death." New courage and hope came back to me then, and looking up once more at the strip of shining stars I thought they glanced down now with a kindly smile rather than a gay indifference, and even as I gazed my left foot, scratching the rocky wall, found a place wherein to lodge. A little to the right, a little lower down, my other foot found a hole in the cliff, and I knew I was at the top of a rude stairway. Climbing up again, I told my companions, and, bidding them follow me, descended again till my head was level with the topmost cavity. Atris came next, and as he hung over the verge, vainly trying to find his foothold, I seized his legs and placed them in the right position, then receded out of the way.

Each one thus guiding the feet of those who came after, we slowly and laboriously went down that invisible stair into the chasm. I had counted fifty footholes passed in this way when suddenly, without an instant's warning, a rumbling and rattling of boulders and dislodged earth, accompanied by a yell of terror so wild and unearthly that it made our hearts stand still, followed by a dull splash, and then another shriek of fright and another splash, rose up out of the dark deep below, the noise and echo of the fearful sounds vibrating dismally in the vasty space. Then all was still again—silent and gloomy as the grave, save for the murmur of the river as it wound along its sandy channel far beneath. Two of our foes had missed their hold and fallen into the stream.

Not one of us dared to speak, as, with bated breath and shaken nerves, we continued our mad descent till, with an exclamation of relief, I felt my feet rest on the topmost rung of a cedar-wood ladder, firmly fastened to the rock. Down this, with quickened pace and fresh zeal, we stepped, finding ourselves, when at its lower end, upon a broad landing-place under the shelter of an overhanging crag. I would have gone on down a sloping path to the right, that I thought I could make out, but the soldiers, one and all, refused.

"We have come far enough," Valdo said, even his rough voice trembling a little; "let us stay here till dawn."

"So say I," urged reckless Atris; "in the light we can at least see our way."

"So be it, then," I said, yielding, and posting myself on the right to guard against any sudden surprise from below, I told them to get what sleep they could. For myself I could not close my eyes, though to do so would have been a welcome relief from the sight of the overpowering darkness that encompassed me, rendered all the darker by contrast with that narrow ribbon of twinkling stars overhead, like an arch of golden spray flung over a gulf of gloom. So I sat and watched it with weary head until the far-off ravine top began to glow with a pale pink light, that broadened and brightened with wonderfully soft gradations till the stars vanished, and the edges of the gully stood out sharp and clear against the sunlit sky. But down there in the gorge night lasted longer, nor could we see our way until an hour had passed since dawn.

Then we saw, by the spectral light that filtered down, that we stood at the top of a sloping path that led to a large settlement of the cliff dwellers, whose cedar-wood houses were grouped together in a large hollow in the rock face. Also, bargaining with the inhabitants, we saw Quitzaal and his ninety and odd Ulmecs just at the foot of the dizzy path. They saw us at the instant we saw them, and one of the Ulmecs, a long-limbed savage, drew bow and sent me a shaft which splintered against the stone on which I stood.

"Two can play at that game!" I cried, "and I will teach these rebels that I am not called the Slinger for nothing! You, men, give them a volley, but avoid the Governor, and try not to injure the cliff people."

They answered me by sending a deadly volley amongst the exposed troop, whilst I managed to hit and topple over the clumsy giant who had shot at me, and, thrown into confusion, the whole band broke into a run, and passing the village, came to bay on a little platform, from whence a long ladder fell straight to the river's edge. Down this ladder the hurried rebels began to scramble thoughtlessly; it broke beneath their weight, and, taking over a score of them with it, collapsed into the foaming torrent, and was swept away. The quarry we had hunted down so long and doggedly, was now delivered into our hands. Running past the cliff-dwellings we thirteen attacked them without a moment's pause, and though they numbered over sixty, had much the best of the struggle, having choice of ground to retreat, whereas with them to step backwards meant instant death.

The Ulmecs stoutly resisted my efforts to reach the Governor, but "Sunderer" proved an irresistible talisman, and hewing my way through with the good blade, I at last got him separated and engaged him hand to hand. He was older than I, and more cautious, but so used had I become by this time to all the tricks and twists of swordcraft, that I soon obtained the mastery, and could have slain him a dozen times had I wished. But I was weary of killing, and meant no more than to take him prisoner, so that the Queen could pass sentence upon him, and make his degradation a warning to all others who might meditate similar revolt. He, divining my intention, strove hard to cripple me by one foul blow, and finding that in vain, lost his coolness, threw away his weapon, and sprang upon me suddenly in a mad effort to bear me with him over the platform's edge.

"Ha!" I cried, "you surely forget, Sir Governor, that I was once named the Iron-fingered, and that on board the *Ravager*, when I was but twenty, I could hold a man out at arm's length!" and getting a good grip of him round the waist, despite his frantic struggles, lifted him clear off his feet and dragged him away from the dangerous brink. In so doing, so great was his frenzied resistance, I felt "Sunderer" escape my hold and heard it slide along the sloping ledge and fall into the abyss. Calling to Valdo to seize the Governor, I disengaged myself roughly from his embrace and sprang to the verge to see the last of my dear and true comrade of steel. So quickly did I spring that I was in time to see it glancing from a jutting limestone crag, chipping off a piece as it glanced, and clanging thence down a shelving sandstone slope towards the river. I gave a cry of despair when I thus beheld Mitres' priceless gift, as I thought, doomed to be lost in the current, but next moment was so relieved as to give vent to an exclamation of delight. The matchless sword, as though conscious of its repute and aware of the great deeds it had yet to do, wriggled as it slipped like a living thing, and just when its hilt touched the water, caught by its point between two inequalities in the red rock, and there lay, out of my reach, but within my sight.

Now I turned to ward off a blow that one of the Ulmecs aimed at me, and in so doing felt a quick fiery pain in my back, and knew that another foe had driven his weapon

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into me. Striking down the savage in front with a fierce stroke, I twisted myself half-round so sharply that the blade quivering in my back was wrenched from the grasp of its owner, and so roughly that as I turned I saw him lurch forward, and then disappear over the awful brink. Then, seized with a sudden faintness, I fell upon the ledge, Atris stepping over me barely soon enough to avert a dozen hovering swords. With a swift jerk he pulled the rankling blade from my flesh, and heedless of the barbarians who beset him, bound up the gaping wound as well as he was able. Then he gently turned me on my back, and picking me up in his arms, bore me up to the ledge, away from the fight, staggering under my weight as he went, but holding bravely on, in spite of the steep ascent, the narrow track, and the darts that whistled after him.

Looking over his shoulder, though feeling as one in a dream, and all things appearing to me in that guise, I could see Quitzaal lying bound upon the platform, while Valdo and five others were keeping the remaining Ulmecs at bay. As my preserver climbed heavily up the path, turning an angle in the cliff, I saw, glancing upwards, the thirty men who had refused to follow at sunset, coming down the long ladder with all the speed so awkward a means of transit would allow. Atris saw them, too, and called loudly for them to hasten, his voice sounding like the roaring of a cataract in my ears.

It was not many paces now to the cliff dwellings, and he stumbled on with almost superhuman strength that he might place me there in safety, for to leave me lower down would be to block the way. Loudly rang the wild yells of the infuriated Ulmecs along the rocky walls of that great ravine; loudly our friends, hurrying to our relief, called to us to be of good cheer; grimly stern Valdo, blood-stained, and dust-soiled from head to foot, held his own against the terrible odds; hoarsely my comrade of few words panted and groaned, as with faltering steps he bore my great weight up the dangerous declivity, the sweat standing in great beads upon him.

"Only a few more paces, brave Atris, only a little more endurance, and we shall reach the hamlet on the cliff—another staggering stride and we are there; he has placed me flat upon the cool rock, and, exhausted, sat down to regain his breath, and wipe his heated brow; there go the rescuers, running past us down the ledge—one, two, three—thirty of them, all told—now many faces cluster over me, pity in their gaze; many gentle hands are busied loosening my armour and tunic—some of them are women's faces, swart, but pleasing. Hark! there comes a sound of sharp fierce fighting from the unseen depths; it lasts a moment, then all is still, and all things swim before my eyes in a white cloud mist. Am I truly dead? Is this truly the Land of Shadows? And where is my magic blade?"

Thus my thoughts ran whilst they tended my hurts, and I glided into a dreamless sleep, nor did I know any more of what was happening around me till two suns had risen, and shone, and set, and a third was piercing the gloom o'erhead.

(To be continued.)

RESULT OF JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION, No. 21.

The first prize of £5 goes to Mr. Geo. Percival, signalman, H.M.S. *Australia*, Netley, Southampton Water, Hants.

Prizes of £1 each have been sent to Mr. Alan B. Maclachlan, 4, Mildenhall Road, Clapton; Mr. H. H. Harrod, 7, Dingwall Avenue, Croydon; Mrs. McQuaker, 7, Ailsa Place, Girvan, N.B.; Miss Kate Hedderwick, care of Mr. G. Morton, Morton's Theatre, Greenwich; Mr. A. F. Howgate, 43, Ince Green Lane, Ince, near Wigan.

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION, No. 22.

The London guinea was awarded to Miss Mary Wilson, 19, East Dulwich Grove, S.E.; and the Provincial guinea to Mr. George Humphreys, 19, Colville St., Nottingham. The words transposed were *organisation* and *employment*, p. 680.

JUST TO PROVE YOUR UNSELFISHNESS,

Ye men readers of *S.S.*, give a thought to your lady friends this coming Christmastide. *Pearson's Weekly* has provided a very excellent Christmas number, but when you're reading it you won't be happy unless the people about you are equally so. Go then and straightway invest in

THE TREBLE CHRISTMAS NUMBER OF

HOME NOTES.

And go quickly, for the edition is a limited one, and you may otherwise be doomed to disappointment.

Everyone likes to entertain their friends with Charades, or something of that character: the charming drawing-room play by **Huan Mee**, entitled **"Sitting it Out,"** should therefore prove of great interest to you.

If your overwhelming pride at the longest and most peaceful reign on record has not caused your end ere reading this announcement, your appreciation of

"The Private Life of the Queen,"

which figures largely in this issue, should know no bounds. Furthermore, it is illustrated with photographs especially taken for the purpose by one who has had rare opportunities. Here are some of the headings of future articles:

The Queen as a Dancer; The Queen as a Housekeeper; The Queen's Gold and Silver Plate; The Queen's Friends; The Queen's Religion and her Sunday Observance; The Queen as a Hostess; What the Queen Eats and Drinks.

Miss JEAN MIDDLEMASS has altogether excelled herself in the preparation of an MS., the first instalment of which appears in the Treble Christmas Number. There is also a dainty little country idyl, **"The Lassie with the Sun-kissed Locks"** by name, which cannot fail to please.

That Charming Mimic, Miss CISSIE LOFTUS, too, has been persuaded to wield her pen for the further gratification of *Home Notes* readers, a second short story, entitled **"A Tiny Tragedy,"** being the result.

A Charming Coloured Plate, **"A Morning Call,"** will also be presented gratis with each copy.

Jumbled Story Competition.—24.

On opposite page appears a story, each line of which is numbered. The lines are all in their wrong position, and the prizes mentioned below are offered to those who write on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order most nearly correct. The title is jumbled up, and should be correctly given *and pasted on the paper containing the effort.*

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday,*
2 awarded to the readers whose solutions first
3 *JUMBLED STORY.*
4 Four Prizes—one of £5 and three of £1 each—are
5 *December 14th,* and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reach this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose keys are most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

£2 is offered to the first of the readers living in Ireland who succeeds in forwarding the correct, or most nearly correct, solution.

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JUMBLED STORY No. 24. [*See Page 754.*

THE IDEA OF FLEN.

The detective curled up his long body on my sofa, and smoked my cigars with the keenest enjoyment. I implored him to relate one of his thrilling experiences.

The detective rose to his feet, and threw the end of his cigar in the fire.

The detective paused, with due regard to effect. I implored him to continue.

The detective paused for a moment, and gazed wistfully at his empty glass. I hastened to refill it.

"I will tell you a story of the very worst man I followed. All that is known for certain is that Scotland Yard, laid the matter before the police.

"At one time this man occupied a certain position that were lying at the side of the line. Without hands the effect might have been very serious.

"When we arrived at Lyndhurst, I was surprised in Society. That was before his true character approach her again.

"In the meanwhile the wedding bells rang out a mile from the station. I followed him cautiously.

"A nature like Evelyn Carrington's could, of doubt, of catching the first train to town. When he publicly announced, the fury of the rejected suitor "A scoundrel of the name of Carter.

"His love was of the kind that you writers so ventured to approach Mr. Egerton, and told him the line carefully, and then waited until it became the very eyes of the assembled company.

"Thus ended the life of the worst man that I ever have ever had the misfortune to meet," he said.

"That was the end of his social life."

"As I came to the station I saw that the special had disappeared. I assure you it did not take me quietly at the bride's country home at Lyndhurst, seriously alarmed, and, bringing them up to my hand on his arm. He swung round, and for a a little out-of-the-way village on the East Coast. In spite of the disguise, I recognised my man.

"When, on the top of this, the engagement of bridegroom had already taken their places. I communicate with my superiors. I found this easy became generally known. Incredible as it may seem making a detour, came out on the railway line about turns to hatred.

"One night there was a reception at the conservatory. That was the first act of the tragedy. Had they all been allowed to reach Miss Carrington's house. He found Miss Carrington alone in the work, for Carter spent most of his time in his rooms.

"You must understand that after the line leaves Carrington's, and Carter forced an entrance to the Lyndhurst Station it runs round a sharp curve, and he fell passionately in love with one of the purest knew."

"The wretched man threw open the carriage door to see him walk away in the opposite direction to to Liverpool Street Station.

"No sooner had Carter boarded the train, to destroy the bride and bridegroom on the very wedding-day approached his letters became so repulsive to the girl, and she forbade him ever to to shadow the man Carter day and night, and on the crash over the aqueduct, into the water below.

"Having laid the sleepers across the line Carter knew no bounds.

"As the train drew out from the platform I laid slightest suspicious movement on his part to Miss Carrington to the Hon. Charlie Egerton was and fairest girls that ever God created; this man stamp of Carter. Nevertheless, throughout a much difficulty he laid these across the line in such a rush for the retreating train, sprang on to the North."

"After this incident Carter began a long series thankful for having escaped my clutches, than he set out again for the station with the intention, no altogether surprised to find myself following Carter Carter was forcibly ejected by the butler before dawn of their married life."

"The train crossed the aqueduct, and bore the violent and threatening that the Hon. Egerton was London season he forced his attentions upon her. In the end, the very sight of the man became who was little more than a brute beast.

"This, then, was his diabolical plan of revenge; for Carter. A workman, with a bag of tools on his happy couple smoothly and swiftly away to the dusk before making his next move.

"The wedding ceremony was to take place quite course, have nothing in common with a man of the thoroughly appreciate; a love, when scorned, that of persecutions against Miss Carrington. As the train was preparing to start, and that the bride and telegraph office to have the train stopped.

"I will not attempt to describe the scene that footboard, and so into an empty carriage that had against the parapet, and then dropped like a stone man, and, believe me, they were not pleasant reading.

"My orders were clear and simple. I was told off When the eventful morning arrived I was not the Hall. He struck out across the fields, and man slip through my fingers. I rushed to the shoulder, was slouching up and down the platform.

"These letters were my first introduction to the Egerton. I saw the evil look in Carter's face, and then over an aqueduct that spans a large stretch of water, and so on to the North. Carter examined merrily. Evelyn Carrington became the Hon. Mrs. had all been done in an instant, but I had let the a way that a train rushing round the curve would been reserved for luggage. I stood stupefied. It remembered the sleepers that he had laid across the his. Then he shook me off, and with an oath made come to inevitable destruction, and in all probability moment looked at me with those piercing eyes of long to remove the sleepers. Then I followed him. that he had nothing to fear. Then I looked round presently watched him approach a pile of sleepers line. Already the train was nearing the fatal corner. and sprang out. His body shot with terrific force to the water.

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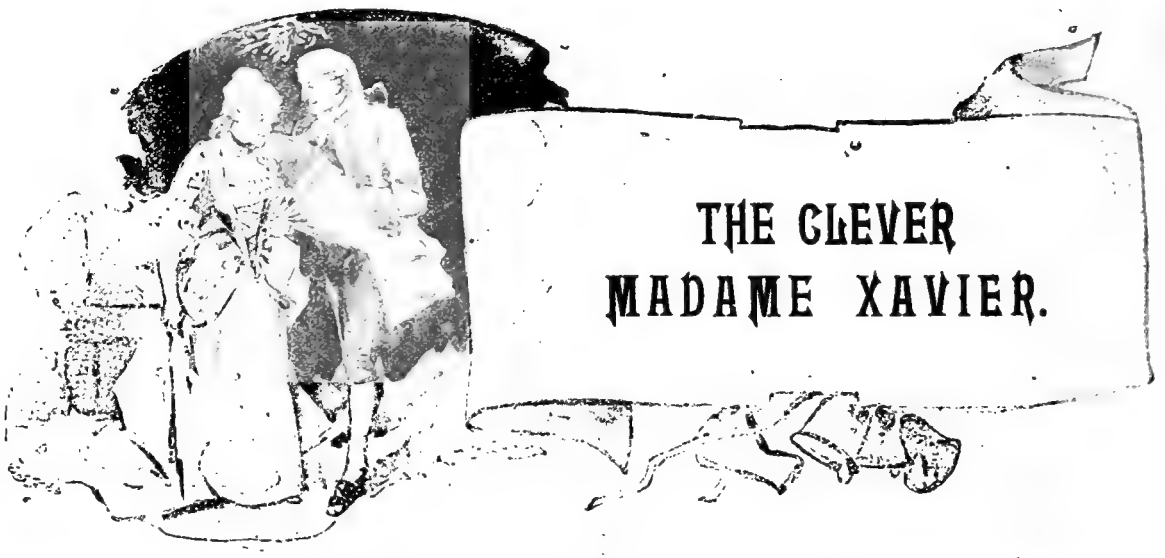

THE CLEVER MADAME XAVIER.

MADAME XAVIER kept a shop at the end of the street. Such a tiny shop, with only one window to it and a bit of a counter piled high with bunches of gay yarn and boxes of cheap tinsels. There was a bird in a cage in madame's window which always sang furiously in the early morning, and a pot of mignonette in blossom adorned the sill.

Just across the road lived the sausage vendor, a little old man, who wore a wig, and dressed in snuff colour.

He was early at his post every morning frying sausages, but being cruelly afflicted with asthma, he could only speak in a loud, hoarse voice, so his daughter, Annette, a dream of health and beauty, would stand beside him in her neat stuff gown, and call in a voice as lusty as a chanticleer:

"Hot sausages! Hot sausages!"

Now, diagonally across, in the next street, was a tall brick building, used as a storehouse. Its lower rooms were piled with dusty white bags full of grain, over which the satin-coated mice frolicked and grew fat as the livelong day; but up in the top of the building was a large garret rented by a poverty-stricken artist.

Here were pictures strewn all about the room, while in the middle of it stood a large stout easel supporting a bare canvas. Every morning the artist crept down from his lofty quarters to buy hot sausages of M. Laubeau and to cast sly glances of intense regard at Annette, who, for her part, kept on at her calling as if there were no young men in the world.

But when he turned to go back to his garret then would Annette smile and toss her head, with its white cap, in a coquettish nod to the little madame across the road, as much as to say: "See, I have an admirer!" And madame would smile back, for she dearly loved a romance. Sometimes she would beckon to Annette, and when the girl ran lightly across the street the old woman would say:

"When will the wedding be?"

"Ugh!" Annette would answer. "Could I eat paint? I thrive now and am comfortable. Monsieur must make his fortune ere Annette weds him."

"And he shall do it," returned the little madame one day. "I will myself speak to monsieur."

That very day when the artist passed her shop with a canvas well wrapped in paper under his arm, the little Frenchwoman called to him. "Come in," she said. "Show me the picture."

Reluctantly he undid it, and disclosed a pensive-faced Madonna.

"*Fi donc, monsieur!*" exclaimed madame. "But she has a sickly look. I do not wonder you may not sell her. We have enough like her. Monsieur must paint different—something gay and cheerful—fresh, you know."

"I am too poor to hire a model," said the artist gloomily.

"Ah, truly," replied madame; "but suppose I could find a model. Would monsieur paint?"

"Perhaps."

She led the way through the tiny shop to a tinier living-room. There, in one corner, looking very big and clumsy, stood an oaken chest, with the lilies of France carved upon it. The old woman unfastened a key from her chatelaine, and knelt before the chest. She paused.

"Monsieur must know," she said gravely, "long ago in France my people were not poor, but rich. That was before the Revolution, monsieur, before their names were knitted into the cruel Madame's stocking. They fell. We have always been poor enough since. *Ce coffre* contains my great-grandmère's ball gown. Monsieur shall see."

She unlocked the chest, and lifted a covering of tissue paper, shook out a rich white satin gown, heavily embroidered with pale blue forget-me-nots. The stomacher was thickly sewn with seed pearls, and wide ruffles of rare old lace edged the neck.

The artist gave a cry of admiration: "A costume of the time of Louis XVI. How exquisite!"

"Here are her slippers," continued madame, holding up a pair of white satin slippers adorned with tarnished gold buckles, "and these are the gloves she wore. To think I have them yet, monsieur, and my great-grandmère dust these one hundred years! We might have sold her

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toilet over and over again when we were hungry and cold, but we always preferred to suffer for my grandmère's sake. Listen, monsieur. Little Annette across the street—you love her. I have seen so. She has a heart as sweet as a nut, and as bonny a face as ever the sunshine kissed. If I put these robes upon her she will look like *une grande dame*, fit for monsieur's brush. She will be fresh like a rose, and as beautiful. She shall be monsieur's model, and will make his fortune."

That night, then, the sausage vendor took in his stand. Annette, free at last, slipped across the road, and the old madame robed the girl in the grand toilet and fastened her soft, fluffy curls in a knot high on her head with a quaint tortoise-shell comb. Wrapped in cloaks, the two stole down the street and entered the tall building. They threaded their way among the dusty bags, scaring the satin-coated mice, and climbed the stairs to the artist's studio.

When his eyes fell upon the vision of loveliness madame presented to him they shone with a new light. Love? Well, part love and part artistic rapture, but in either case Annette was the cause. The little Frenchwoman clapped her hands and laughed joyfully.

Always during the sittings madame sat decorously by, knitting industriously, but keeping open a sharp eye, as became a good chaperon. Not the slightest symptom of love-making escaped her. The portrait grew beneath the brush as if the very fairy of good luck had lent her spell to the artist. Never had his palette glowed with such colours, nor had such hitherto impossible tints blossomed forth. Every detail of the fresh young face became familiar to him, until at last from the canvas looked forth the sausage vendor's daughter in the grand dame's robes as beautiful as the proudest lady in the land.

"I can do no more," sighed the artist. Then madame arose, and, taking the girl by the hand, led her towards the door. "Monsieur has no longer need of us," she exclaimed. "Adieu!"

But the artist would not have it so. He pushed past the old Frenchwoman and stood before the girl.

"I love you, Annette," he cried. "Will you not marry me?"

"Tut, tut," said madame. "You must first speak to M. Laubeau. We will have no bold English manners here. If he consents, then Annette may think of you. Come, Annette."

It was, indeed, true that the little madame had brought good luck to the poor artist. The portrait was sent to a picture dealer. In less than a week it was sold, and orders had come through the dealer enough to set the artist busy. He went to thank the old Frenchwoman.

"The good people like something fresh," said madame. "Monsieur might have sat in his garret and pined and been melancholy until he died. Good luck would have had none of him. One must be brave and smile to win fortune."

"I owe everything to you," said the grateful young man.

"Ah, true!" returned madame nonchalantly; "but, tell me, have you yet won M. Laubeau's consent?"

"Alas! he refuses me Annette's hand! He will give me no reason."

"We must learn," said the madame, and leaning far out of the window of her tiny shop, she beckoned frantically to the sausage vendor across the road. He came, followed by Annette.

"Why is it M. Laubeau refused his daughter to the young monsieur who loves her truly?" inquired the Frenchwoman.

"I could not get on without Annette," grumbled the old man. "There would be none to cry out 'Sausages!'"

"True, true," said madame; "but must the young people be unhappy for this?"

"I am old," continued the sausage vendor, "and I have but Annette. If I yield her to the young monsieur, who will care for me?"

"Let me think," said the Frenchwoman. "Ah, I have it! 'Tis well to be comfortable in one's old age, and a companion is useful. If M. Laubeau wishes it, I will reconsider the proposal he made me years ago. He shall fetch the sausage stand across the road and set it here—in front of my shop. The priest shall make us one, and I myself will cry 'Hot Sausages!'"

PERCY WINCH.

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YVETTE GUILBERT. **Lancers,** by **Warwick Williams** (on Yvette Guilbert's Popular Songs.)

VIOLIN SOLO ...	**"Canzonetta,"**	*G. Calaman.*
SONG ...	**"The Nectar of the Vine"**	*A. M. Friedlander.*
STATELY DANCE		*Caroline Lowthian.*
SONG	**"My Sweetheart's Love is Mine"**	*Florence Aylward.*
SONG ...	**"The Sergeant's Wedding"**	*E. St. Quentin.*
BABY QUADRILLE		*P. Cressonois.*
DANCE	**"Two Step"**	*H. J. Leslie.*
VOCAL WALTZ	**"Old King Cole"** ...	*A. G. Crowe.*
AMERICAN DANCE		*Louis d'Egville.*
WALTZ & GALOP	**"Solo Dance"**	*L. Gautier.*
POLKA	**"Carnovale"**	*R. Furbank.*

ALSO

A SPECIAL ARTICLE ON "MUSIC OF THE MONTH."
By R. HICHENS.
And a most interesting article by **Joseph Bennett,** entitled,
"CHRISTMAS IN SONG."

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The Mirror

THERE was once a kingdom where mirrors were unknown. They had all been broken and reduced to fragments by order of the Queen, and if the tiniest bit of looking-glass had been found in any house, she would not have hesitated to put all the inmates to death with the most frightful tortures.

Now for the secret of this extraordinary caprice. The Queen was dreadfully ugly, and she did not wish to be exposed to the risk of meeting her own image; and knowing herself to be hideous, it was a consolation to know that other women at least could not see that they were p retty.

You may imagine that the young girls of the country were not at all satisfied. What was the use of being beautiful if you could not admire yourself?

They might have used the brooks and lakes for mirrors; but the Queen had foreseen this, and had hidden all of them under closely joined flagstones. Water was drawn from wells so deep that it was impossible to see the liquid surface, and shallow basins must be used instead of buckets, because in the latter there might be reflections. Such a dismal state of affairs, especially for the pretty coquettes, who were no more rare in this country than in others.

The Queen had no compassion, being well content that her subjects should suffer as much annoyance from the lack of a mirror as she felt at the sight of one.

* * * *

However, in a suburb of the city there lived a young girl named Jacinta, who was a little better off than the rest, thanks to her sweetheart, Valentin. For if someone thinks you are beautiful, and loses no chance to tell you, he is almost as good as a mirror.

"Tell me the truth," she would say; "what is the colour of my eyes?"

"They are dewy forget-me-nots."

"And my skin is not quite black?"

"You know that your forehead is whiter than freshly fallen snow, and your cheeks are like blush roses."

"How about my lips?"

"Cherries are pale beside them."

"And my teeth, if you please?"

"Grains of rice are not as white."

"But my ears, should I be ashamed of them?"

"Yes, if you would be ashamed of two little pink shells among your pretty curls."

And so on endlessly; she delighted, he, still more charmed, for his words came from the depth of his heart; and she had the pleasure of hearing herself praised, he, the delight of seeing her. So their love grew more deep and tender every hour, and the day that he asked her to marry him, she blushed, certainly, but it was not with anger. But, unluckily, the news of their happiness reached the wicked Queen, whose only pleasure was to torment others, and Jacinta more than anyone else, on account of her beauty.

* * * * *

A little while before the marriage Jacinta was walking in the orchard one evening, when an old crone approached, asking for alms, but suddenly jumped back with a shriek as if she had stepped on a toad, crying:

"Heavens, what do I see?"

"What is the matter, my good woman? What is it you see? Tell me."

"The ugliest creature I ever beheld."

"Then you are not looking at me," said Jacinta, with innocent vanity.

"Alas! yes, my poor child, it is you. I have been a long time on this earth, but never have I met anyone so hideous as you!"

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"What! Am I ugly?"

"A hundred times uglier than I can tell you."

"But my eyes——"

"They are a sort of dirty grey; but that would be nothing if you had not such an outrageous squint!"

"My complexion——"

"It looks as if you had rubbed coal-dust on your forehead and cheeks."

"My mouth——"

"It is pale and withered like a faded flower."

"My teeth——"

"If the beauty of teeth is to be large and yellow, I never saw any so beautiful as yours."

"But, at least, my ears——"

"They are so big, so red, and so misshapen, under your coarse elf-locks, that they are revolting. I am not pretty myself, but I should die of shame if mine were like them." After this last blow, the old witch, having repeated what the Queen had taught her, hobbled off, with a harsh croak of laughter, leaving poor Jacinta dissolved in tears, prone on the ground beneath the apple trees.

* * * * *

Nothing could divert her mind from her grief. "I am ugly—I am ugly," she repeated constantly. It was in vain that Valentin assured and reassured her with the most vehement oaths.

"Let me alone! you are lying out of pity. I understand it all now; you never loved me; you are only sorry for me. The beggar woman had no interest in deceiving me. It is only too true—I am ugly. I do not see how you can endure the sight of me."

To undeceive her, he brought people from far and near; every man declared that Jacinta was created to delight the eyes; even the women said as much, though they were less enthusiastic. But the poor child persisted in her conviction that she was a repulsive object, and when Valentin pressed her to name their wedding day—"I, your wife!" cried she. "Never! I love you too dearly to burden you with a being so hideous as I am." You can fancy the despair of the poor fellow so sincerely in love. He threw himself on his knees, he prayed, he supplicated; she answered still that she was too ugly to marry him.

What was he to do? The only way to give the lie to the old woman and to prove the truth to Jacinta was to put a mirror before her. But there was no such thing in the kingdom, and so great was the terror inspired by the Queen, that no workman dared make one.

"Well, I shall go to Court," said the lover, in despair. "Harsh as our mistress is, she cannot fail to be moved by the tears and the beauty of Jacinta. She will retract, for a few hours at least, this cruel edict which has caused our trouble."

It was not without difficulty that he persuaded the young girl to let him take her to the palace. She did not like to show herself, and asked of what use would be a mirror, only to impress her more deeply with her misfortune; but when he wept, her heart was moved, and she consented, to please him.

* * * * *

"What is all this?" said the wicked Queen. "Who are these people, and what do they want?"

"Your Majesty, you have before you the most unfortunate lover on the face of the earth."

"Do you consider that a good reason for coming here to annoy me?"

"Have pity on me."

"What have I to do with your love affairs?"

"If you would permit a mirror——"

The Queen rose to her feet, trembling with rage. "Who dares to speak to me of mirrors?" she said, grinding her teeth.

"Do not be angry, your Majesty, I beg of you, and deign to hear me. This young girl whom you see before you, so fresh and pretty, is the victim of a strange delusion. She imagines that she is ugly."

"What is all this?" said the wicked Queen.

"Well," said the Queen, with a malicious grin, "she is right. I never saw a more hideous object."

Jacinta, at these cruel words, thought she would die of mortification. Doubt was no longer possible, she must be ugly. Her eyes closed, she fell on the steps of the throne in a dead swoon.

But Valentin was affected very differently. He cried out loudly that her Majesty must be mad to tell such a lie. He had no time to say more. The guards seized him, and at a sign from the Queen the headsman came forward. He was always beside the throne, for she might need his services at any moment.

"Do your duty," said the Queen, pointing out the man who had insulted her. The executioner raised his gleaming axe just as Jacinta came to herself and opened her eyes. Then two shrieks pierced the air. One was a cry of joy, for in the glittering steel Jacinta saw herself, so charmingly pretty—and the other a scream of anguish, as the wicked soul of the Queen took flight, unable to bear the sight of her face in the impromptu mirror.

CATULLE MENDÈS.

The XMAS DOUBLE NUMBER of SHORT STORIES will be published on Tuesday, December 22nd. Price 2d.

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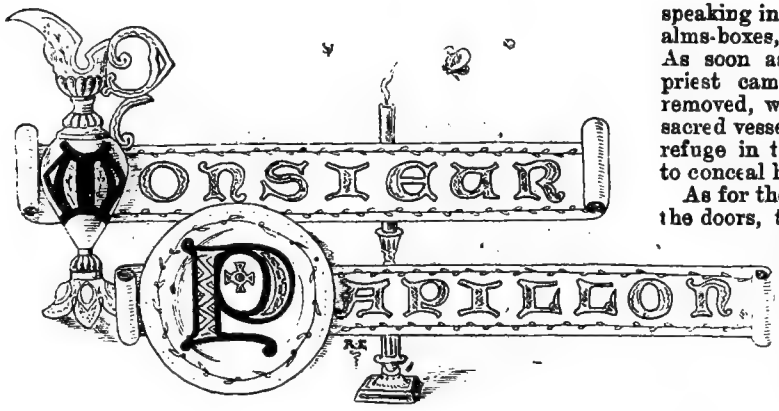

M. Papillon had lightly doubled the cape of his fiftieth birthday, and for twelve years had been beadle in a grim old church in the upper part of Paris, not far from the fortifications. He was a tall man, an old soldier, strong as an ox, and more inoffensive than a lizard on the wall. He had a large, round figure, a comfortable double chin, closely shaven; his eyes were frank and kind. The calves of his legs, strong, egg-shaped, with the muscles well developed, exactly filled his snow-white stockings, and rounded out fully, with an air of good health, under the garters, which were tightened until they creaked. They were his sole coquetry, and he seemed as proud of them as a wrestler of his biceps.

On fête days the boys and young men of the choir, when they had taken a drop too much, amused themselves by tickling those two cushions of good flesh as they passed, and an old beadle, M. Jolitour, who remembered his youth, had said many a time, while complacently admiring those legs: "They are Parian—pure Parian."

M. Papillon, who had not the least understanding of any Grecian word, while relishing the compliment, would have been glad to know the meaning of the word "Parian," but had never dared to ask. He was a colossal model—a pearl of a beadle. He took snuff, smoking no more. Under no circumstances did he take the name of God in vain. He expressed himself always with decency and drank only to quench his thirst. He avoided the other sex. His handling of his cane was very distinguished, and his masters had left him grand traditions of the halberd. After the siege of 1870, during which M. Papillon, as everyone else, had done his duty on the ramparts, a singular, confused murmur of revolt filled the capital. Groups formed themselves on the pavements.

The policemen were questioned; they professed ignorance, but lifted their heads with a knowing air. People speechified. In the wine shops, orators aroused the working-men. Social questions were discussed in a suggestive manner. The working-men demanded finally what belonged to others. This agitation troubled M. Papillon. He heard on all sides the words, National Guard, riot, civil war, eighteenth of March. But, as he did not wish to believe anything disturbing, he said: "It is some trick of the Stock Exchange."

However, to believe became inevitable, when one morning a handful of men wearing red sashes presented themselves and demanded to see the priest; they showed a paper signed by a magistrate ordering the immediate closing of the building. They strode about the church speaking in loud voices, took the money from the alms-boxes, and withdrew without harming anyone. As soon as they had taken their departure the priest came out hastily from his concealment, removed, with the assistance of M. Papillon, the sacred vessels and the richest ornaments, then took refuge in the house of a woman who had offered to conceal him.

As for the beadle, that same evening he closed all the doors, that of the main entrance, whose folding doors had iron-work of the fourteenth century, and those of the side aisles. He locked them with a triple lock, drew a bolt a foot long, then fastened across them the safety-chain. This done, he placed the chairs in piles against the walls. When he had fulfilled those painful duties, during which night overtook him, he was assailed by terrible thoughts of the aged priest, and that the incidents of the day would be a terrible blow for his brain; the vicars would slip away to the provinces, hiding themselves with their families, and that he would remain alone, in future, all alone to guard the church.

At this thought, in the terrifying calm of the silent sanctuary, it seemed to him that an immense responsibility had fallen from the lofty arches upon his trembling shoulders, and he had a moment of weakness as he weighed the difficulties of the task and the powerlessness of the servant.

M. Papillon had always shown for "his church" an adorable personal passion. "She" belonged to him. For nothing in the world would he see her overthrown. "She" belonged to him, and to the good God. He loved the grand nave, the choir, the side aisles. He admired the baptismal font, the organ pleased him greatly, and the crypt was dear to him. But the sacristy, with its encaustic placards, its doors draped with velvet, which fell softly, its penetrating odour of ecclesiastic robes, inspired in him a peculiar tenderness. It was there, in a small, cold room, where were placed the chasubles commonly used, that he slept ordinarily, and it was his home during the time of the Commune.

The house of the Lord had the appearance of an abandoned gymnasium. It slept, torpid, in its robe of grey stone, lugubrious and desolate as those churches of the Middle Ages bending under the weight of an "Interdiction." One would scarcely have believed that in the shadow of those walls, only a few steps away, a revolution was established. Sometimes the strains of the Marseillaise sounded about the angles, sometimes the shocks from artillery caused the dust of ages slowly to fall—that is, the sawdust and small pieces of stone gathered in all the nooks of its ogives, and then all fell again into an unrelenting silence.

M. Papillon guarded the church like a faithful dog: at night his ears caught every sound; he started at the least nibble of a mouse. It seemed to him that someone was picking the locks of the doors. Horrible nightmares bathed him in perspiration, or unnecessary vigilance drew him from his bed, in bare feet, a light in his hand, and in spite of the clamorous beating of his heart, he would go the rounds of the church.

It was as dark as a cave. As he passed by, the green curtains of the confessionals floated lightly. The chandeliers, with their pendants of crystal, fell from the roof like monstrous spiders at the end of a thread, and the pulpit, suspended to a column, stood out in the shadow like a giant holy-water vessel. The

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spectacle unnerved M. Papillon, and he returned shivering to his bed.

By what marvel had the Commune forgotten this old church, hidden in a tangle of old streets? Why did the storm pass over it without attacking it? No one ever knew, not even M. Papillon. From day to day he tried to make himself less conspicuous, hiding himself, living in an obscurity reached only by the mole, as if all these precautions would be a safeguard for the temple and shelter it from all inquisition and sacrilege. He spoke only in a low voice, and wore slippers. He went out as little as possible, and always, by preference, at dusk, in order not to attract attention to "her."

When he returned he resorted to the ruses of a Nihilist being pursued, exhausting himself in frequent turns and roundabout ways, regarding each passer-by with anxiety. Objects also became accomplices in his pious thoughts; they were sunk in a profound torpor. The woodwork did not creak, and the organs held their powerful breath, as if they understood.

From time to time to distract himself, he climbed to the tower, and when he mounted the two hundred and fifty steps of the narrow winding stairway, near to the great, silent bells tattooed with inscriptions in Latin, he looked at Paris through a narrow opening. Paris the great criminal, covered with heavy clouds. The clamours of the delirious city rose insolently towards heaven, and to him, M. Papillon, simple beadle; violent anger took possession of him as of "Moses on Sinai," on seeing in the long avenues, in the places, in the courts of the barracks, intrigues and rioting, and the swarming of the revolutionists, who looked no larger than insects.

What good purpose will it serve to follow honest people as if they were beasts, and to declare war on the God of Armies, when one could be so happy doing one's easy little service, keeping the wood floors of the sacristy polished like a mirror, and leading the church wardens to their pews? What a misfortune! And he redescended from the bells, muttering some words remembered from an Easter sermon: "You will become a second Sodom and Gomorrah;" and it was true, he saw it.

One afternoon, when he had ventured out a little, to take the air, he had a real fright—he came upon a platoon of the National Guard, who were singing.

The officer, a large man, looked him in the eyes, and stopping him, said: "You belong to this quarter, citizen?"

"Yes," murmured M. Papillon feebly, and it seemed to him that "his" church loomed up above the roofs larger than Notre Dame, looked gigantic, causing itself to be seen for miles. But it was not "she," poor thing, they wished. The officer sought the number of a house in a neighbouring street. Although M. Papillon did not know the address, he immediately offered himself as guide, found the street, ferreted out the number, and accompanied the lieutenant, whom he called "*my* captain," as far as the door. This man was capable of every baseness to distract attention from "his" church.

* * * * *

However, time passed. The interminable days slipped by in the most dolorous enervation. The dust heaped itself on the altars, the spiders wove their webs between the chandeliers; at the bottom of the holy-water basin some bands of copper were spotted with verdigris. He effaced them, filled with despair. One day, when he had gone out according to custom to make some small purchases, Madame Davouille, at the bakery, whispered in his ear: "It is for the day after to-morrow!"

"What is that you say?"

"From Versailles!" whispered she.

M. Papillon remained silent from the shock, not finding a word to say.

"Yes, the day after to-morrow they re-enter!" affirmed the honest woman. "If I were in your place I'd take a four-pound loaf, because I shall not open the shop after this evening."

M. Papillon, his bread under his arm, returned excitedly. It was true, then. This revolution was about to be finished; he would no longer be obliged to hide himself like a brigand. He would see again the white head of the priest, the large hands of M. Loiséau, the organist; the red skirts of the choir boys, and the silk cap of Father Branchu, the bestower of the holy water.

The lamps of the sanctuary would speedily be relighted! Thank God, there were now on the list some grand marriages and rich interments! As in the good times, there would be the catechism, again the holy eucharist would be carried to people in the last extremity, all would be happy again! And he felt tremors of delight at the thought of a church thoroughly clean, with clouds of incense floating over the kneeling faithful ones; what joy to see appear again points of gold on the tall candles.

The following morning he was awakened by the noise of cannon. There was fighting in the streets. The baker had not been mistaken. Dread and hope rent the heart of the beadle. Erect, in a corner of the chapel of St. Agnes, he listened to the sounds of artillery which rapidly approached. The loudest detonations threw him upon his knees. They were killing each other in the quarter, behind the barricades blood would flow in streams. They were slaughtering the women certainly, and the children also, for cries surged up like the wail of savage beasts when being hacked to pieces, rending the air each second. A great light illuminated the church at times, when it seemed to be embraced by the purple rays of a glorious setting sun.

M. Papillon, in his narrow and simple fashion tormented by I know not what military and religious coquetry, resolved to make himself fine to assist in the triumphal entry of those brave soldiers who were going to bring peace once more. He imagined, innocently, that the conquerors, with the clarion sounding, would bring back with them the priest, the vicars, the organist, the little *Benedicamus*—all the dead absentees. He opened a clothes-press, drawing from it a package of clothes enveloped in a napkin, and reverently, without haste, carefully made his toilet to the sound of the cannonading, with as much tranquility as if to the sound of the organ.

He put on the fine stockings, the kneebreeches of "crushed strawberry," with vest of the same shade, the coat trimmed *à la* Louis XIV., also a baldrick of embroidered velvet, from the bottom of which dangled a sword in its steel scabbard; took in one hand his cane, in the other his halberd, and wearing his plumed hat, gravely seating himself and waited, pale and expectant.

Now they were fighting behind the church. With a dry sound, like pebbles rattling on a sheet of paper, the balls perforated the windows, sometimes splintering the leaden sashes, which came down upon the stone flagging with loud clatter. Two frightened owls fluttered in the nave. M. Papillon looked and listened.

Suddenly the great door, with its ironwork of the fourteenth century, trembled from top to bottom, beaten

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by the butt end of guns, in the midst of a clamour of imprecations: "Open the door! In the name of God open the door!" The beadle hastened, and in a clear voice, that trembled from emotion, asked: "Who is there? Is it Versailles?" Silence followed.

The cries redoubled, became shrieks: "Yes, yes! Versailles, Versailles!" But as he proceeded to draw the bolts, under the weight of the enraged and violent assailants, with blows like that of a battering-ram, the old door gave way—the lock flew in pieces, and folding doors rattled back against the walls with such force as to break some Venetian blinds, which, thus opened, admitted the dawn. In the light from a conflagration a crowd burst into the church—women with hands blackened with powder, in the mask of the damned, took possession of the house of the Lord.

When M. Papillon saw those devils escaped from Hades invade "his church," spread themselves everywhere, enter the choir, he attempted to cry out against the sacrilege—to speak—to weep. He extended his arms, but he had not even time to move his lips—to make a single gesture. The torrent overwhelmed him, carried him as if he were a cork. In the twinkling of an eye, the doorkeeper of the good God was snatched up—his shanks in the air, his backbone broken, he was drawn along the floor by his coat, like a used-up puppet. A half-hour later, when some soldiers penetrated, with circumspection, the great, empty, silent church, which presaged nothing good, they were stupefied to see, stretched on his back across the steps of the grand altar, a huge man in kneebreeches and French dress.

About the body two owls hovered in the rays of the sun.

Henri Lavedan.

An Eye for an Eye.

A Legend of Venice.

"Come nearer, my little pet dove, and lay thy head on my breast—so. Now am I better able to defend thee from danger."

The man bent down, and impressed his passionate kisses on the dark cheek of the maiden. The gondola rippled slowly through the moonlit waters, while above, the bright Italian stars shone lovingly over the fair city of Venice.

"Ah, Marguerita, it is good to live. How happy we are together. What wouldst thou do if I were to leave thee?"

The girl stroked her lover's hand with her cool fingers.

"Speak not like that, Francesco, for thou knowest well that thou wilt never leave me, nor I thee."

"Supposing an assassin were to plunge a stiletto into my breast, what then, little dove?" For in those days such deeds were common.

The dark eyes of the maiden flashed fiercely, and her little hands clenched.

"First I should be avenged, Francesco. I would slay thy murderer even as he had slain thee. Then should I follow thee to the bright land of which thou hast told me."

The man gazed down at the girl in his arms, and knew that her words were spoken in earnest. With such lover-talk as this the hours were chased away, until the moon rose high into the bright sky. The gondola was drifting slowly down a secluded canal. On either side were tall, grim-looking houses, indicating that their owners were people of no little wealth. Presently the young man rose to his feet and steered the gondola to one of the more pretentious of these.

"Farewell, Marguerita; sleep well, and dream of me." The girl ran lightly up the steps, and, after pausing for a moment to wave her hand to her lover, disappeared within.

Humming a little tune to himself, Francesco sprang back in his boat, and with a few swift strokes, shot out into mid-water.

But what is this which moves behind the curtain What is this which slowly rears its head of wild, dishevelled hair, whose eyes shine like burning coals, whose teeth are as the fangs of a tigress, whose nails are as the claws of a she-wolf? What is this which creeps slowly forward, and then springs on the man, and buries its claws in his eyes, and its fangs in his throat, that drives a dagger three times into his heart, and then seizes him in its arms, and hurls him into the dark waters? What is this strange thing which steers the gondola back to the stage of Pietro the boatman, and then runs quickly away until it finds shelter in the darkness of night?

"It is an evil Spirit," said Pietro, and crossed himself devoutly.

For a man and a maiden had set out in his boat together, and the boat had returned with neither man nor maid, but only with a wild Thing, which said no word, but ran swiftly past him.

Soon the early morning sun shone out over the

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lagoons. For long years the little latticed window of Francesco's room had opened, and his rich, mellow voice had gone out to greet it. But to-day it does not open, and the singer is silent, for Francesco is lying dead beneath the waters near his lover's home.

That night the old father had dreamed strange dreams of his son. Now he is waiting for the sound of the opening window and the cheerful song.

"I will go to arouse him," he said at last, as he hurriedly slipped on his garments and left his chamber. He opened the door, and called gently: "Francesco! Francesco!" but no answer came.

"I will go to Pietro the boatman," said the old man, "for he, perhaps, has seen my son."

But Pietro, with his white face, could only answer to his questions that Francesco, the night before, had gone out with Marguerita on his arm, and that the gondola had returned with neither one nor the other, but with an Evil Spirit.

"Show me the gondola," said the old man, "we may find something that they have left behind them."

"It is this," replied Pietro, "and there is nothing—stay, what 's that in the corner yonder? Holy Virgin, it is a dagger, and see, there are the marks of blood!"

"Alas! Francesco, oh, my son Francesco, is it possible that thou art dead?" The old man's grief was pitiful to behold. Pietro, too, was sorry.

"I will go at once to Marguerita. She, perhaps, may know something."

Marguerita was standing on the steps of her house, throwing bread to the pigeons.

"Good-morning, father," she cried. "Hast thou seen Francesco? Is he well to-day?"

"Alas, my daughter, I know not whether he be dead or alive. The gondola returned without him, and Pietro says there was only an Evil Spirit. There were marks of blood in the boat, and see, we found this dagger. Surely my son is dead."

"Let me see the dagger," said Marguerita. She looked at it for a moment, and then she said: "I do not know it." But in her heart she knew that it was the dagger of Laurella, her rival.

All that morning Marguerita shut herself in her closet, and mourned for her lover, and planned to avenge his death, as she had promised to do. She knew well that it was Laurella who had done the cruel deed; for she had loved her lover with a mad love, as she had hated her with a mad hatred. Often had she sworn to slay the one or the other, to avenge the love which had been denied her, and the oath of an Italian maid is not lightly to be despised.

It was all made clear to her now. Laurella had cunningly hidden herself in the gondola, trusting that the lovers would sit together and drift quietly down with the current. Then, when she herself had sought her home, she had sprang out, and murdered Francesco.

"She has slain him," cried Marguerita, "and even as she has killed him, with her own dagger, so will I kill her."

Thus she remained in her room, weeping, and musing on her vengeance.

Laurella, too, with the mark of a murderess upon her, kept her closet that morning. Then, lest appearances should be against her, she strolled out through the many little lanes and by-ways of Venice. At this moment a boy brushed past her, and placing a missive in her hand, ran hurriedly on. With trembling fingers she opened the paper and read these words:

"Thy life is in danger. One who has something to give thee seeks opportunity to speak with thee. Be, without fail, in the old courtyard of the ruined Palazzo, near thy home, at two in the morning."

Laurella returned hastily to her room to solve the riddle. She waited until the sun had sank to his rest, but heeded not the glories that he shed over the City of Waters. She waited until the stars came out in the sky, and then her mind was determined. She put on only a long, dark cloak, that hid her form from head to foot, and placing a dagger carefully in the folds, she set cautiously out to the ruined Palazzo. The place, now old and deserted, at one time was the palace of princes. The four walls of the courtyard almost surrounded it on every side, while in one corner the grand stairway led up to the entrance.

Laurella, keeping cautiously in the shadow of the moon, hid herself behind a pillar, and waited, trembling. As her eyes became accustomed to the dim light, she discerned a figure moving among the pillars opposite. It was robed, as she was, in one long garment, but this was white, and glistened strangely. Suddenly the figure stepped out into a patch of moonlight, and Marguerita's clear tones came across the square.

"Laurella, I have something to give thee!"

She started at the words, but answered boldly:

"Ah, it is Marguerita, the stealer of hearts. I, too, have something for thee."

Hastily throwing off her robe, and grasping her stiletto firmly in her hand, with a laugh on her lips, she stepped forward.

Marguerita also placed her cloak on the ground, and came slowly forward, with one accusing arm pointed towards her rival, while the other, the arm of the avenger with a dagger in the hand, was held aloft.

Thus the strange duel began, woman's arm against woman's arm, woman's love against woman's hatred.

Slowly, step by step, they advanced towards the centre of the square. Then, with a sudden spring, they rushed onward, and the sound of clashing steel rang out sharply.

They recoiled, and closed again in fierce embrace. Laurella's breath came hot and quick, in short gasps. Marguerita's face was white and stern and set, as she warded the blows with her dagger, and awaited the opportunity to stab.

Fast and hard came the strokes from Laurella's weapon. The lust for blood flowed through her veins, and suddenly, gathering all her strength together, she sprang wildly forward. Marguerita stepped aside, and her own steel entered the uplifted arm. With a cry of pain Laurella dashed her weapon to the stones, and, turning, fled away. She sped swiftly round the square, with arm uplifted, and her long hair streaming out behind, but fast as she ran Marguerita ran faster behind her, until she felt the hot breath upon her neck. Then with a wild cry she darted towards the grand staircase.

At that moment her naked foot trod on the dagger lying on the ground. She stumbled heavily forward, her head crashed against the foot of the stairs, and she lay, with her face towards the stars, white and rigid on the cold pavement.

Marguerita stopped and gazed for a moment on the beautiful form of her enemy. Then she knelt down and sought with her dagger's point for her rival's heart. She placed both hands on the hilt and pressed upon it with all her strength. Then she rose to her feet, and leaving Laurella lying cold and stark beneath the pitiless rays of the moon, she threw on her white robe, and quietly left the courtyard.

MADGE MORRIS.

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HIGH PLAY.

A Comedy off the Stage.

BY GEORGE MANVILLE FENN.

CHAPTER LV.

True Without Ties.

"Confound it, I wish I had half his heart," groaned Braetoun, as he went straight to the bar, ordered brandy, drank it at a gulp, and then went up to his room, where he threw himself on a couch; but he had hardly sunk back before the door was thrown open, and a little fellow, whip in hand, in long overcoat which just showed his boots, ran in, threw off his bowler hat, displaying a handsome, boyish face with closely cut hair, and dragging open the long coat, took an amber and black jockey cap from the breast pocket and drew it on, at the same time revealing the amber satin shirt—the Braetoun colours—above his breeches and boots.

"What the devil!" exclaimed Braetoun, springing up excitedly. "Why, boy, will you dare to mount her?"

"Yes, Rod, and win."

"Lucy!" he shouted, falling back on the couch with open mouth.

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For a moment the pretty, fair face was convulsed, and the Cupid boy-like lips quivered; then the features were hard and firm, and, with eyes flashing, she buttoned up the coat, and gave her boot a cut with the whip.

"Quick!" she cried harshly. "There isn't a minute to spare. I heard the plot yesterday—went home with Auntie. She had these—you remember the chorus in the little opera—I made her do the dresses in your colours. I have only just come."

"But—oh, madness! You can't ride her."

"I can, and I will."

"No, no, it's folly, girl."

"It's to save my own, dear, old boy," she cried, with her face twitching again, but only for a moment.

"But you can't ride her, Baby."

"Then who can?"

"The trick—the jockey's dodging."

"Put me on Bella Donna, and I'll be first at the post, or die."

"No; bad as I am, girl, I can't let you do that."

"Rod, you shall now; quick, or I'll go alone. It's your last chance, and——"

"Come on!" he cried; and, wild with excitement, he rushed with her out on to the landing, followed her down the broad stairs to where a fly was waiting, and in two minutes they were at the deserted stable, where Braetoun's hands trembled so that he could hardly unlock the door.

"We shall be too late—too late," he groaned.

"They're never to time," she said. "Ah, my own old pet," she cried, as she ran to the stall, where the mare stood facing them, reined to the rings on the pillars, and a whinnying welcome met her as she began to unbuckle one strap. "Now, Rod, risk it. Clap on the saddle. I'll manage the bridle."

"Too late—too late," he groaned; "we can never do it."

"The saddle," she cried, her own hands busy with the bridle, which hung all ready, and by the time Braetoun had unbuckled the roller, and slipped the cloth from the beautiful satin skin, Lucy was ready to help him by taking the saddle from the wooden horse, and placing it in his hands.

Braetoun, strung up by the brandy and excitement, worked as he had never worked before, the saddle was clapped on, with the mare not so much as wincing, only keeping up the soft whinnying noise, and turning her velvet muzzle to play with the girl's little white hand.

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"We shall never do it, it's the time now."

"We *will* do it," cried Lucy, as the last girth was buckled. "They're always late, and I'm going to win now. Quick, a leg up—no, one moment," and she threw off her coat, stepped before the mare, and, whip in hand, took hold of the bit, raised the muzzle, and looked in the beautiful great gazelle-like eyes of the fierce beast.

"Bella Donna—beautiful lady," she cried, with the tears in her eyes, "for your poor little mistress's sake, make me win."

She kissed the mare's forehead, and the next moment put her dainty foot in Braetoun's hands, to be lightly thrown into the saddle.

"Now," she cried, "for the sake of our good old times."

"For the sake of the old times," he groaned; and taking the rein, he led out the mare and ran by her side towards the saddling paddock.

As they approached the hotel, a little crowd of people was passing out to make for the course close at hand—for, consequent upon the usual want of punctuality, there was ample time—and just as one of the party was loudly cursing his luck, and swearing Braetoun had sold the race, another caught sight of the graceful mare approaching, with the peculiar colours of her jockey.

He threw his hat in the air with a wild yell of delight.

"Bella Donna!" he roared, and there was a shout, which was taken up by voice after voice, running right into the saddling paddock, so that as Braetoun, with his face scarlet, ran up with the mare, they were greeted with a tremendous burst of cheering, and a heavy-looking man and a boy, the former showing a broad weal across his face, elbowed their way to the front and tried to get to the mare.

"Mind, Rod, look out!" whispered Lucy.

The warning was not needed, for, as Braetoun caught sight of the pair he shouted:

"Fair play! Keep those two hounds back. They tried to sell the race."

A fierce yell of execration burst out, and the crowd closed round Vinnis and his son, who were hustled out of the paddock in spite of their frantic appeals and the father's declaration that Braetoun was to blame.

Those in charge of the other horses looked on aghast, and then took comfort as they stared at the jockey on Bella Donna's back.

"Pitch him into the middle of next week before we start," said one of the other jockeys with a grin; and then he stared to see how patient the mare was while the preliminaries were gone through, and Lucy carried herself as if to the manner born.

"Why, where did you pick up that boy, Braetoun?" cried one.

"Keep back, please," he said sternly. "You know what the mare is. She may lash out."

"I tell you what it is," said one old race-goer; "you ought to be ashamed of yourself to put the poor lad upon such a she-devil. The boy will never come back alive."

The behaviour of the mare seemed to endorse his words, for, growing excited now by the people about, she began to fidget, laying down her ears, rolling her eyes and showing the whites, while her teeth were bared, ready to lay hold of anyone near.

But each time she seemed at her worst Lucy bent right forward over her neck, and patted and talked to her in her sweet, low, cooing voice, with the result that the mare whinnied and calmed down.

"Bravo, my lad!" cried the gentleman who had cheered as he came out of the hotel. "You'll win. There, my lad, you come to me afterwards, and I'll give you a hundred pounds."

Lucy nodded and smiled, and Braetoun led the mare away toward the course.

"Sits her as if he had grown there," cried the last speaker. "Hang the boy! he's good-looking enough for a girl."

For a moment or two Braetoun felt that it must all be a dream, and that in this dream, with its wondrous mingling of impossibilities, Cyrus Daines had found and conjured Lucy into the good genius who was to save him from utter abject ruin.

But no, it was real enough, and he was leading the mare, which ambled along gently with her rider sitting easily and as it were upon the softest springs. The cheers too, which kept on greeting them were real enough, and at last the misty sensation of unreality settled down into the stern matter-of-fact.

And now, with his heart beating in low, heavy throbs, a feeling of icy horror began to creep through his veins, chilling him, and freezing up the power of thinking of anything but a few stern facts, the essence of which settled down into the bitter question:

Had he not done this poor, true-hearted little creature sufficient injury without sending her to a horrible death? for he felt now that he was going to let her attempt the impossible, and that it could only have one end.

They were in the course now, and he was walking so near that he had but to raise his head and look up sidewise to meet her eyes. But he dared not do that; he could only walk on, with the afternoon sun pouring down hot and bright, and casting their shadows as they went on with the crowd on either side of the course cheering madly at the sight of the favourite, which they had been told would not run. And whenever there was a lull, Bella Donna's backers started the cheering again, while handkerchiefs and race cards were fluttering in the grand stand, and hundreds of glasses were following every pace.

"I can't do it—I can't do it," groaned Braetoun. "It's madness. Poor little lass; she shan't die like that."

He checked the mare, and she began to resent it, shaking her head and making so fierce a plunge that she jerked the rein out of his hand, but Lucy sat firmly in her saddle, yielding to the mare's bound, which brought her a little in front of Braetoun, and in an instant his hand was on her arm.

"No, no," he whispered hoarsely, "curse the money, the mare, the whole world. I've been a brute to you, Baby, but I can't save myself in such a way as this. Come back; you shall not ride."

She bent down a little till her lips were close to his ear.

"God bless you for that," she whispered; "then you do care for me a little still. Rod, dear, I'm going to win."

He raised his hand to seize the rein, but at the slight pressure of her rider's heels, the mare made a tremendous bound forward, and away she went, to follow the example of the others taking their preliminary canter, gliding over the yielding turf like a swallow, and apparently with as little effort.

"Ah!" groaned Braetoun. "Once more too late."

"Why, Braetoun, old fellow," said a member of his club, "you look as if you'd seen a ghost. Hold up. You'll win now. We've been cursing you up hill and down dale for selling us. Wherever did you pick up that little jock?"

"Had an interview with Mephistopheles," said another, smiling, "sold himself, body and soul, so that he might win this race."

"Right! Quite right," cried Braetoun, with a laugh which sent a chill through his companions. "That's what I have done, and I'm going to win."

"You are, thank goodness," cried the first speaker. "By George, look at that! Well done, little one. Look at the handsome little imp. He rides her like a fairy."

For Bella Donna swept by with her hoofs hardly seeming to touch the ground, and Braetoun hurried on to try and get a word with Lucy before the start.

"Racing's exciting," said one of Braetoun's friends to the other; "but hang me if it doesn't seem something far above that to old Roddy. He looks as if he were going to have a fit."

But before Braetoun had gone many steps he heard his

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name pronounced, and caught sight of Daines standing on the step of a carriage, gesticulating wildly to him.

He slipped aside, for he was in a state of exaltation in which he was swayed by any impulse.

"Then it's all right; you found him?" cried Daines.

"Yes," said Braetoun, looking at him strangely; "it's all right—I've found him."

There was no time for more. He had to find a place by the winning post, the desire being gone which would have taken him after the horses to the starting point, and a peculiar sensation of weakness, the reaction after the wild excitement of the last hour or so, paralysed his limbs.

Ghastly white now, he stood holding on by a rail, listening to the roar of voices and the wild booming of a bell; and once more feeling as if in a dream, he stood waiting for what seemed to be an hour, while someone high above him, armed with a pair of race-glasses, spoke aloud in a clear, distinct voice, for the benefit of a man with a note-book and pencil.

"Getting them all together. Eight," said the man. "Good line. Bella Donna breaks away. Gone right off backward. Coming back. Another off—forward this time. Lord Granger's filly. Got them together again. Splendid line. Flag falls. No, no, false start. Bella Donna again. Hundred yards. Made them all restive. Blue with red stripe rearing and nearly losing her rider. See card. All right. Mr. Davenport's mare. Good line again. No; all in disorder. Won't start them off. Ah, quickly and cleverly done. Flag down as soon as amber gets in place. They're off."

A dull, low murmur of excitement drowned the greater part of what was said afterwards, that peculiar breathing of a vast crowd at the full pitch of excitement; but as he clutched that rail, the words which related to his mare came with metallic clearness to Braetoun's ears and he heard that she was for some time running nearly last, and he felt that it was all over, that Lucy in her utter ignorance of racing could not by any possibility win. But it did not matter, so long as she came in safe that would be sufficient. He wanted no more. Only let her come in safe.

He could not pray, or in those brief moments, with every nerve strained to maddening, breaking point, he would have breathed an appeal for the poor girl's safety.

It was all in those maddening minutes, and he closed his eyes as the man above him, seeing what would have been hidden from him by his position had he striven to follow the race, went on dictating his brief notes.

"Tittup, Davenport's filly. Fair Amy making the running; rest nowhere; with Bella Donna as whipper-in. Unchanged. Coming round the corner. Fair Amy falls back; Tittup and the filly have it all their own way. Bella Donna drawing even with last horse. Boy can't manage her. Losing her chance for third. The filly drawing a head; Tittup nearly sick. No. Cleverly ridden. She closes up again, and favorite nearly clear of the ruck behind. Good promise for third. On the straight. Good race. Bella Donna's jockey settling down for the run home, coming on hand over hand. Good third. Tittup first. Bella Donna challenging the filly for second place. Good race level; clear by a head; challenges Tittup."

What more he said was drowned in the wild roar of excitement, and Braetoun strained forward, wild-eyed and staring now, to watch the finish of one of the most exciting races of the season, as, still so far behind that all chance of success seemed impossible, Bello Donna's rider could be seen almost motionless as she stood in her stirrups, while the mare literally skimmed over the turf as if madly desirous of passing the filly, whose jockey, after a glance behind, was urging her on with whip and spur, working his reins and doing everything he knew to reach the post first.

The race seemed certain, and the exciting roar was for Bella Donna as she strove her best, a full length behind, when close home; but a few bounds and she was drawing up—half a length, a neck, a head, behind; and then, as if warming more and more to the task in hand, she literally shot past her adversary, faster, faster, faster, and in the midst of the wild excitement, Braetoun, with starting eyes, had a glimpse of the amber satin, as the mare swept close by him like a flash, and Tittup thundered by, more than a length behind.

CHAPTER LVI.

With her Heart's Blood.

Lucy's struggle seemed to be yet to come, for the mare swept in full career; but a minute later she had obeyed the steady pull upon her bit, and turned, to come gently back, Braetoun, trembling like a leaf, hurrying to meet her, take the reins, and, surrounded by an excited crowd, lead her to the scales.

But before they reached the weighing place there was a rush made by a wizen-faced jockey in long coat, evidently with some sinister intent. Whatever it was, though, was checked by one of the mounted police who formed the winner's escort. The constable reached down from his horse, caught the lad by the collar, and turned him back while the rider passed into safety.

"Have—have I really won?" panted the girl, as she bent down to speak to Braetoun.

"Won? Yes," he whispered back. "Oh, my own brave, true heart! But," he cried excitedly, "you're bleeding! What is it? Did she throw up her head and strike your face?"

"Oh, no: nothing, nothing," she said, with a little laugh, as she sprang lightly from the saddle, threw it over her arm as soon as it was free, took her seat in the scales, was judged all right, and then as she sprang up she caught at Braetoun's arm with a peculiar pallor gathering in her face.

"Quick! to the hotel!" she whispered; "take me away from here. Auntie!"

Friends were gathering round; men were cheering the successful jockey, and scores were eager to shake hands; but horror-stricken now, Braetoun shouted to the people to stand back, and hurried his companion to where he could find a cab, into which he helped her, sprang on to the footboard, and shouted to the driver to take them to the hotel.

It was quickly done, but an excited crowd was in full pursuit, and they had hard work to reach the place first.

The news was there before them, and a burst of cheers from the people in front of the house greeted them, as Braetoun sprang out, and Lucy followed lightly, but only to sink into his arms, fainting, with the blood trickling in a scarlet thread from her lips.

"Here! a chair," cried Braetoun. "Now carry—" he nearly said to his own room. "Send up some champagne."

There was no difficulty in finding the right room, for Aunt Duncan, with her red face mottled with white, stood at the head of the stairs, and seizing Lucy's hand wildly as soon as it was within reach, guided them into her apartment, where the insensible little figure, with the gay satin shirt now stained with blood, was carefully laid upon a couch, but only to open her eyes, staring wildly and fighting for breath till she was once more in an erect position.

"What have you done—what have you done?" cried Aunt Duncan wildly.

"The mare must have thrown up her head—lips or tongue cut. Quick, a glass of water! Ah!" cried Braetoun wildly, as the awful truth struck home like a flash. "Here one of you there—the nearest doctor!—run!"

The man who had helped to carry the chair ran off, nearly striking against a slight-looking figure which had just reached the door.

It was being closed in his face, but he forced his way in.

"Rod, I congratulate——Lucy! Oh, my God!"

Daines rushed to the couch, to fall upon his knees and catch one of the little hands in his. Then snatching his handkerchief from his breast, he tenderly wiped the tiny trickling stream from the quivering lips before him.

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"A doctor! quick, a doctor!" he panted. "Oh, send again. He is so long."

"Never mind," said Lucy, with a piteous little laugh, as he held the handkerchief again and again to her lips. "It doesn't matter. I've won—I've won.—Take care of her, Rod, for my sake.—They got before me so. They wouldn't let me pass—but—but—I did it at last."

"Here, drink this," said Bractoun, snatching a champagne glass from a waiter who had brought it to the door, but she shook her head.

"No, not now," she said in a strange, choking voice; and she turned to Daines and smiled, as he half supported her. "Thank you—so good to me—always, but this is best."

She turned from him and gazed at Bractoun—one long earnest look, and then struggling wildly she threw herself round to get her right arm round the neck of the sobbing woman kneeling by her on the other side of the couch. There was another effort to raise her lips for a farewell kiss but the exertion hastened the end. One hoarse choking cry accompanied by a horrible gush of blood, and Bractoun stood staring down at her as if turned to stone.

Just then the door was opened, and the doctor summoned entered the room, made his way quickly to the couch, and was about to tear open the gaudy amber shirt, but with a wild cry Daines forced him back.

"No, no," he cried; "don't touch her now. She is dead—she is dead."

The doctor bowed his head as he gazed curiously down at the light, graceful figure with its small waist and swelling hips, before saying softly:

"Yes, I can do nothing here. Evidently the rupture of an aneurism. No human skill could have saved her life."

As the words left his lips there was a deafening cheer from the front of the house. As it ceased a stentorian voice roared, with the words coming plainly through the open window:

"Bella Donna's rider—bring him out!"

Another burst of cheers followed, and a discordant band brayed out the first few bars of "See, the Conquering Hero Comes."

Daines had gone quickly to the open window, and softly drew down the blind, just as the landlord of the hotel was hurriedly explaining what had befallen the conquering hero, and the last notes died away in the awful silence which fell, while as soon as the blind touched the window-sill, Daines standing there with his back to the rest, slowly raised the blood-stained handkerchief he held to his lips, and hid it carefully in his breast.

* * * * *

It was in an over-crowded first-class carriage that evening, on the way to London, and the speaker, a blatant, over-dressed personage of the horsey type. There had been a good deal of canvassing of the day's event, and the individual in question had listened with undisguised contempt.

"Don't tell me," he said—"a gal? No gal could have ridden and won that race. But I tell you what is a fact. Lord Bractoun wins to the tune of thirty thou., so he ought to do something for the boy's mother, who was down to see him ride."

"Then you are sure it was a boy?" said another occupant of the carriage.

"Swear it," was the reply, and a thin white hand was laid slowly on the arm of a gentleman at the side, but the latter made no sign; he only turned his head to gaze into the darkness of the night, as if to see the hedges and trees seeming to fly by as the express train tore along.

But Roderick Bractoun saw neither tree nor hedge, only that little lithe figure bending over Bella Donna's neck, her large eyes gazing straight ahead as if into futurity, as she swept by him like a meteor across his path of life—saw only passionate, loving, true-hearted Lucy Lee, winning the race of her misdirected little life—in death.

"My God!" he groaned to himself; "and for such a wretch as I."

CHAPTER LVII.

The Gamester's Settling Day.

Six months had passed away, during which Murray had seen nothing of the Bractouns; but much of the time had been taken up in his own struggle back to health. Then one morning Emsworth called at Wimpole Street during a visit to London. For as soon as the old man had somewhat recovered from the stroke which prostrated him he had taken Murray's advice, jumping at it, so to speak, to get Olive beyond her husband's reach, and gone on the Continent.

"Not that it was necessary," said Emsworth on this occasion. "It has been the best trait I have seen in his character; he has never attempted to follow her, though if he had I'd have set every law at defiance, and carried her off from place to place. By my will they should never have come together again. It's all very well to talk about forgiveness, Murray, but you must give up after the seventy times seven."

"But about your health?" said Murray hastily.

"Oh, I'm all right—for an old man. But as I was saying, he has never attempted to follow her, and after all, wild scamp as he was over money matters, he has never touched her income since."

Murray turned half away, and the old man went on chatting, doubtless to the great annoyance of waiting patients.

"The old lady isn't so particular, though," said Emsworth, with a chuckle. "She sends me very pitiful begging letters from time to time, unknown to Bractoun, I'll swear. She says he is quite penniless, and that she finds it hard work to keep up appearances, and to pay her expenses and the doctors at the watering places where she takes her son for his health. But they don't hurt," said the old man, with a queer look. "I'll send her anything she likes, if she'll only keep him away. Seen him lately?"

"I? No," said Murray sharply.

"He's in a bad state, I suppose, poor fellow. He's doing penance for his past, and no mistake. Well, I'm delighted to see you again. I was obliged to come to town on business, but I go back to Florence directly. Now, let you and me have a quiet dinner somewhere together. No? Well, if I must excuse you, I must. But you don't look well, Murray. Why don't the physician heal himself? Shoemaker's wife, eh? Why a month in Italy would do you good. I'd ask you to come and join us, and I've proposed it twice to Olive, but it quite upset her, and she begged me not to ask you. She won't see anyone, or go anywhere; keeps to a secluded life with me, and, 'pon my soul, Murray, I'm only too glad. Selfish, of course, but it's perfect bliss to me to have the poor darling with me once more. She frets, of course, but I don't believe she would ever go to him again. There, I'm taking up your time. Good-bye, my dear boy. I hope some day to settle down in town again, and that time will have softened my poor girl's trouble. Then we shall be able to see more of you, as in the pleasant old days."

Murray saw Emsworth twice in the succeeding eighteen months, and from what the old man told him, their life abroad was quite unchanged, Olive shrinking always when he suggested a return to town.

It was six months since he had heard anything of them or of Bractoun. He saw Daines from time to time, but Bractoun's name was never mentioned. Then one morning he was startled from his ordinary course of life, unmoved as he was in his constant struggle to give health to the hundreds who flocked to the popular physician, for Rancer brought in a message that had been delivered by a commissionaire.

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Murray opened the envelope, and turned a little paler than usual, as he found a visiting card within—Braetoun's—and scribbled upon it in pencil, over the address in Montague Street:

"Come and see me for the last time—dying."

The card dropped from Murray's hand, and he sat with his hands resting upon the table, gazing down at vacancy.

"Any answer, sir?" said Rancer at last.

"Eh?" cried Murray, starting. "Yes, say I will come on at once."

At once was none too soon, for the face which confronted him upon being taken to the invalid's room by Lady Braetoun, who still looked artfully young, told its own tale.

"He has been wanting to see you so very much for a year past, Dr. Murray," she said; "but he would not send till this morning. Now do—do prescribe for him as you used to. No one ever did him so much good as you, and I've spent quite a fortune upon him, going from doctor to doctor during the past few months."

"Yes, mother," said Braetoun, with a tinge of sarcasm in his words, "I have been a bad expense to you. Now please go, and Allan Murray will soon set me straight."

"Ah, that's right. He always was so clever, ever since you were boys together at Eton, and you used to bring him home. There, I'll leave you and come back soon. Why, he looks brighter already with your coming."

"Eton? Yes, old Eton," sighed Braetoun; "and it only seems like yesterday. But I'm glad you've come, Allan, old man."

Murray looked at him sternly, with the last meeting forming a background to the wasted face before him.

"She doesn't know—poor dear old butterfly. Loves me her way."

"Do you wish me to try and treat your case?" said Murray slowly.

Braetoun laughed.

"The creaking door that has hung so long on its rusty hinges—to oil them again? You know," said Braetoun, with a smile. "I've fought it off for the last two years, for I wanted to live a bit longer, and you know, too, how careful I must have been. I have, since little Lucy died."

He was silent for a few moments, and then went on slowly:

"I put it off to the last, and then I sent. I wanted to say something, before I ask you to put aside the past ten years, and shake hands as if we were boys once more.—Allan, old man, I know."

He paused again, and passed his thin white hand over his prematurely wrinkled forehead.

"Life's a long mistake to some of us who have no ballast—eh? There, this is beating about the bush. I'll say what I wanted to say—it was only this, solemnly, before I lie back for the long sleep."

He groaned again, and then with his eyes fixed steadfastly upon his old schoolfellow:

"Murray, I sent for you to hear my last words—the words of a man who for the past two years has suffered. Heaven only knows what agony of mind and body—and now this is what, with clear vision of the past, I believe—that you were always to me a true and faithful friend, and that my wife, Olive, was as pure a woman as ever breathed. Will you grip my hand again—once before I go?"

Murray's hand grasped that which was feebly raised; catching it before it fell back upon the couch, and Braetoun smiled, and for a few moments he looked once more to his old companion the bright, handsome, reckless lad of the Eton days.

"At last!"

Five minutes later Lady Braetoun softly opened the door.

"Now you two have certainly had quite long enough to——"

"Hush!" said Murray softly, as he laid down the hand from which the last pulsation had fled. "Lady Braetoun he is at rest."

CHAPTER LVIII.

At Last.

Two years later, Isaac Emsworth was back in Eaton Place, and not alone.

It was a bright summer evening, and Murray had been dining there. He had attended the old man several times since his return.

"Not that there's much the matter, my dear boy," he said, "but seventy isn't forty, you know, and when I'm a little extra wrong, if it's only a chat with you, you don't know how much better it makes me feel."

But upon this particular occasion the conversation had turned upon another topic than Emsworth's health, and in conclusion the old man had said, with no little emotion:

"Heaven knows, my boy, nothing would make my journey to the end easier, and set me more at rest. It has been my dream ever since she has been free, but I made such a mess of it before that I said I would never make a sign, and you know I never did. And I won't stir now—but in Heaven's name, ask her, and see what she will say."

Murray rose from the table where they had been sitting over the untouched wine, and went slowly up to the drawing-room, where Olive was seated thoughtfully alone.

She started from her seat, trembling, as she saw him enter, and in the dim, soft light of the summer evening their eyes met—his, in one long, questioning look—hers, as they dimmed and grew suffused, as they had never looked before in his; and when he raised his hand toward her, the silent answer came, hers fell softly within the strong, firm grip.

"Ah!" ejaculated Isaac Emsworth, when an hour later they went to where he sat, utterly tired out—"at last."

The End.

LOOK OUT

For the Double Xmas Week Number of "Pearson's Weekly."

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